

Vision and Form
in the
DRAMA OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND ARTHUR MILLER

by
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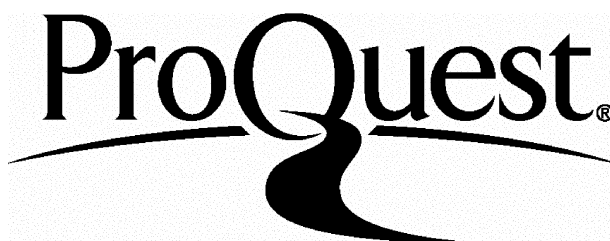
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for PRABHAT

who must now be a big boy

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FOREWORD

FEW living dramatists, writing in English, share the relentless commitment of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller to an exploration of the hopes and disappointments of contemporary man. What distinguishes the two from the rest of the "few" is, apparently, their enormous popular success on both sides of the Atlantic; but, more significantly, their \ fervent concern with the perfection of a dramatic form congenial to their vision of man in the modern world. The production, in 1945, of The Glass Menagerie marked the beginning of an era in the cultural history of the West, of which the climax, in this writer's opinion, is yet to come. A study of the theatre's moral and social concerns during this epoch, as evidenced in the development of two of its luminaries, is the purpose of the following essay.

However, any final evaluation of the position of the two playwrights must rest on the completed work of each, and since they are both young enough, and artistically productive enough, to upset any interim estimates,

it would not be in order, at this stage, to expend too much critical energy in "placing" them in any "tradition" or "school". Some of Tennessee Williams' works, or certain elements in them, may suggest, for instance, a literary descent from the long line of romantic tragedy which originated in the "first American drama", Thomas Godfrey's The Prince of Parthia (1767), and continued well into the latter part of the nineteenth century. Williams' work might equally be viewed in the context of the Southern literary renaissance. In more international terms, it might be related to the expressionist theatre in Germany and, with even greater relevance, to the "dream" plays of Strindberg. Miller's antecedents seem to go back, on the one hand, to the satirical social drama of the eighteenth century in America, or more immediately, to the ceaseless aesthetic activity that hovered round the Group Theatre in the 1930's, and on the other hand, to the social drama of Ibsen and Tchekhov. Both writers would appear to owe a good deal to the Strindberg-derived expressionism and native realism of Eugene O'Neill. Yet, to put Williams and Miller in any of these contexts would be fallacious, because, for instance, Miller, whose early work bore the definite stamp of Henrik Ibsen, seems to have swung very nearly to the opposite pole - Strindberg. Legitimate studies can be, and have been made of the literary and dramatic "influences" in the playwrights' work, but they tend to distract attention from the essence of the plays by fragmenting the integral vision into the "original" content and the "borrowed", or, as is more often the case, into what is presumptuously described as the "source" material, and

the "treatment".

To concentrate on the total conceptions of the playwrights, therefore, the method followed in this dissertation has been one of direct and (it is hoped) close analysis of the plays in a more or less chronological order. Existing critical studies of both playwrights have been profitably used, and particular attention has been paid to the immediate and spontaneous, if inevitably somewhat hasty, response that the first stage production of each elicited. Wherever possible, first-hand knowledge of some recent British performances, in some cases even the cinema and television adaptations, has been brought to bear upon the discussion of the text, but the basic premise in each case has been the printed script.

In view of the prolific output of Tennessee Williams, a greater degree of selection of primary sources has had to be made in his case than in Miller's. But in both, the central frame of reference has been the major full-length drama meant for stage production. Filmscripts, novels, stories and one-act plays, valuable as they are in their own right, have been referred to only where they were relevant to an analysis of the major plays. Likewise, any relationship between the personal and psychological lives of the authors and their works has been kept out of the discussion. Within the limited framework thus provided, however, an effort has been made to trace the development of the authors' social and moral preoccupations in their own times as well as those of a universal nature where a work does transcend the bounds of contemporaneity.

Professor Graham Hough once described the "historical novel" as an absurd term since every novel, Professor Hough said, is "historical": it is subject to the unwritten agreement that it shall present a report on the historical reality of characters and events in a particular place at a particular time. Drama, it must be recognised, shares this limitation with the novel. By its very nature as a mimetic art, most criticism of it tends to concentrate on a discussion of characters not altogether unlike the gossip, on the top of a bus or amidst the smoke of a public house, about actual human beings in life. Presuming it as a "slice of life" the laws of life rather than art are applied to it. There is very little of the stylistic criticism which, in the case of poetry for instance, seeks to find out how the poem "works". Drama is even denied the narrative insight of the novel and much of the latter's "authority" embodied in the novelist's own "voice" as well as several intermediate shades of it articulated by the affirmations and denials of characters who may be close to, or removed from, the authorial sympathies. Committed basically to mimesis, drama - and social drama in particular - tends to be much more of a representational form, and much less of an autonomous artefact, than even the novel. Nonetheless, the mode of representation comes very close to the heart of a playwright. That the play must "work" is vital to him, not only because, during his lifetime, it decides whether he is to live or "die" as a practitioner of his craft, nor merely because he is interested at all costs in articulating the evaluative content of his vision, but, I think, primarily because as an artist he

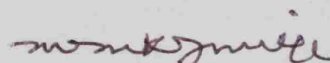
is committed to form as form. This should not be surprising if one considers how many a playwright would surrender all his ideology if only he could uphold his claim, for example, to "Tragedy" — and "Tragedy", after all is a "form-al" designation. The playwright tends to look at drama primarily as a linguistic structure, though his concept of "linguistic" is invariably wider than the literary critic conceives. For there is a whole system of "prosody" or poetry of the theatre as essential to the playwright's mode of communication as verbal imagery. If it remains unobtrusively embedded in the texture of the dialogue, it only shows the dramatist's art of concealing art, which may be why one takes more notice of the verbal poetry of Shakespeare than his theatrical poetry. At any rate, the two playwrights under discussion are both seriously devoted to the sparkle of words as much as the charm that sparkles under the blanket of the dark auditorium. Miller once said of Tennessee Williams that he "creates shows". (He meant no disrespect at all, for on another occasion he picked a bone with John Gassner for not having included Williams among the "social playwrights" of today in a study Gassner undertook for UNESCO.) The description fits Miller's own work just as well. The latter part of each of the two chapters in this thesis, is, therefore, devoted to an examination of the dramatic form the two playwrights have employed to communicate their respective visions. Little effort has been spent, however, on the futile and never-ending debate whether either playwright is a "tragedian" (the tragic implications of individual works having already

been suggested in the course of the earlier thematic analysis), so that the stylistic discussion concerns itself largely with what has been described above as the poetry of the theatre.

A SUBSTANTIAL part of the initial "research" involved in this study had comprised the preparation of what might well be the definitive bibliography so far on Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. However, the scope of the present work made it both impracticable and unnecessary to refer to all the hundreds of items. On the other hand, it was felt that the list could be of considerable assistance to other students of Williams and Miller. It has, therefore, been appended at the end of the main essay, and is preceded by a separate list of references which actually occur in the body of the dissertation. Consequently, too, the footnotes have been kept as brief as intelligibility would allow.

A NOTE on the texts used. In most cases these, and any abbreviations of titles, are indicated in the footnotes. The year in parenthesis immediately following a title refers to the date of the first American edition. However, since copyright regulations restrict one's access in this country to British editions only, all references are, as a rule, to the collected London editions except where a British edition does not exist. The few deviations from this are: the one quotation from the American edition of The Night of the Iguana since the London edition was not available at the time; a small comparison between the

American and English versions of Williams' Period of Adjustment (where the English stage production had adhered to the former); and two rather significant speeches each from the American editions of The Crucible and After the Fall - indicated by an [A] - which have since been deleted from the London texts.



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I

LOCUST UPON THE LEAF: TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

I saw the locust fall upon the leaf
The ripening fruit invaded by the worm
I was instructed, to my bitter grief
That death inhabited each vital sperm.¹

THERE has always been an aura of mystery surrounding the author of the above lines. Born in Columbus, Mississippi, and christened Thomas Lanier Williams, he published - as a youngman - verse, prose, fiction in minor literary journals of the South, and has since grown into one of the most significant dramatists America has produced. Three of his major plays,² as well as most of his stories and one-act plays, are laid in Mississippi, the state of his birth; some of his other plays³ have Missouri, Louisiana, Latin America, the South of France for their locale. A novel⁴ takes the reader on a none-too-happy Roman holiday.

1 Thomas Lanier Williams, "Modus Vivendi", Counterpoint: A Poetic Vanguard, I (July, 1933), 11

2 Summer and Smoke, The Rose Tattoo, and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

3 The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, Camino Real, and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, respectively

4 The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone

None of his works has Tennessee as a background. He has never lived in that state, nor does he regard it as a "home": "If I can be said to have a home," he says, "it is in New Orleans where I've lived off and on since 1938 and which has provided me with more material than any other part of the country."⁵ Yet when he decided to become a professional writer he changed his name from Thomas Lanier Williams to Tennessee Williams. It was a mystery to audiences and readers until he solved it himself by explaining his justification for doing so: "...the Williamses [from whom Thomas had descended] had fought the Indians for Tennessee and I had already discovered that the life of a young writer was going to be something similar to the defense of a stockade against a band of savages."⁶

The most recent mystery about him started with the still unconfirmed fears that he might have been murdered. In England two Sunday papers⁷ announced that Williams had been missing from his New York flat for sometime, and his brother Dakin (an Illinois attorney) had received a letter in his handwriting, written on the stationery of an exclusive New York restaurant, warning Dakin that if he heard rumours about a suicide by Tennessee he should not believe them for it might in fact be a murder. The writing across the top of the letter had read, "Melodrama-

5 Tennessee Williams, "Portrait of a Playwright as a Young Man", Dixie Times Picayune States Roto Magazine [New Orleans], January 8, 1956

6 Ibid.

7 Sunday Mirror, and News of the World, June 30, 1968

tic but true." The more prominent newspapers - in this country at any rate - were completely silent on the subject. Williams' friends did not rule out the possibility of his having merely gone into a temporary retreat.⁸ However, the F.B.I. notwithstanding, nothing further has so far⁹ been heard to either confirm or contradict the report. One wishes most sincerely that Williams himself will solve the mystery by reappearing before long - a new play in his valise, perhaps - but if it turns out not to be the practical joke that one hopes he has played, it will be yet another proof that the Indians were not the last of the savages that inhabited the New World.

At any rate, the savagery that Williams the artist most fearfully apprehended (and has almost always encountered) is the one his writings have brought upon him. Through his work this playwright's name has become synonymous with sex, violence and sadism. Whenever one of his works is presented - on the stage, screen, or in print - priests denounce him, women's leagues (despite the fact that he is one of the ardent feminists of the time) arraign him, and he is subjected to all the masochistic fury of those who guard the public sensibilities.

8 In his Foreword to Orpheus Descending ["The Past, The Present, and The Perhaps", Five Plays, pp 289-90], Williams recalls how he had vanished for a while in order to write his ill-fated The Battle of Angels; again, Mary Bragiotti describes how, overwhelmed by the furore attending the success of A Streetcar Named Desire, Williams "fled from his modest sublet in the East Thirties to an even more modest hotel in the West Sixties, where he'd be even harder to find" [Bragiotti, "Away from It All", New York Post, December 12, 1947]

9 As of July 21, 1968

It seems the more astonishing when one considers the enormously wide appeal of his work. At least three of his plays (The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof) have received enthusiastic professional hearing in communities with such widely different codes of ethics and aesthetics as Argentina and Australia, Canada and Czechoslovakia, Holland and Hong Kong, Iceland and India, Malaya and Mexico, Sweden and Sudan, to pick only a handful of names from the long alphabetical list¹⁰ of countries where permission to perform these works had been granted until 1965. This paradox of destructive popularity was perhaps best summed up by Igor Stravinsky when, conducting a recent performance of his Petroushka - and, incidentally, at the height of his glory - the composer referred with a certain alarm to the "half-century of popularity" which the composition (together with The Firebird and Le Sacre du Printemps) had "survived", and spoke almost with envy to Schoenberg's five orchestral pieces, and Webern's six, which "have been protected by fifty years of neglect."¹¹ Drama, in this respect, is nearer to music than to "literature", and the disservice done Tennessee Williams by his success (though it might sound arrogant to claim this) is due largely to the fact that his audiences - playgoers and readers alike - tend to stop at the surface meaning of his plays. A Shakespeare is too long dead and

9 Appendix to Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, p 164

10 Stravinsky's sleeve-notes to his own recording of the revised (1947) version of Petroushka. CBS Record No. SBRG 72055 [British ed.]

taken for granted to suffer from Lamb's Tales, but a superficial response to a contemporary playwright can do him nothing but injustice. And yet, in Williams' case, this is precisely what happens. That his plays have anything to do at all with perversion, rape, nymphomania, castration, cannibalism - with bizarre activities, in short, and frustrated characters - is sufficient proof for most people that he is himself an advocate of these manifestations of frustration, and thus there can be no more to his plays than this. The cleverer members of his audience, on the other hand, like to give him credit for smartness because they take it as unmistakable evidence that he is out to make a fortune out of this sensational dramatic material. The literary purists - though not doubting the writer's sincerity - take the view which Maxim Gorky took of Dostoevsky's work when he said:

It is nobody's business what is hurting me if anything hurts. To display one's scratches to the world, to rub them in public and let the pus run over oneself, to squirt one's bile into other people's eyes, as many do, and most disgustingly of all, our cruel genius Feodor Dostoevsky used to do - that is an odious business and harmful, of course. ¹²

It is, unfortunately, often forgotten that the scratches which an artist - if he is worth his salt at all - displays to the world are not (regardless of any relation - remote or close - they may bear to his own psychological background) his personal scratches. Nor is it his

¹² Quoted in Martin Green, Yeats's Blessings on Von Hügel, p. 151

chief concern in his work to present pictures of frustration, disease and death for their own sake. And Williams, in this sense, is interested, not merely in painting with minute observation, or even with exquisite artistry, the decaying leaf, but in a poetic exploration of the cause of the decay, in an investigation of the locust upon the leaf. It is this search for the cause of suffering that evolves the artist's moral vision, and reveals his distinctions between right and wrong.

WITH the verse epigraph still in mind, one might look at an early stage of the development of Williams' moral vision wherein he discovers - to his "bitter grief" - that movement of time (in nature) and, correspondingly, of history (in the social context) is a corrosive phenomenon. The values that evolve are apparent, for instance, in a very early short play, The Last of My Solid Gold Watches (included in the volume called Twenty Seven Wagons Full of Cotton, 1946). The play is a sad comment on a world in which standard and character have given way to cheapness and commercialism. The old values of vitality, integrity, good manners and good craftsmanship are represented by "Mistah Charlie", a travelling shoe salesman (in some few ways a percussor of Arthur Miller's Willy Loman), whose bosom is criss-crossed with gold chains at the end of each of which is a solid gold watch representing an annual prize for professional and personal excellence. The new values

or rather the absence of values is depicted in the person of a "young peckerwood", the flabby, indifferent, ill-mannered "squirt" called Bob Harper. Mr. Charlie, who has received the last of his solid gold watches, reflects upon the spiritual and moral decay, and the consequent human suffering, which technological progress has brought about, by recounting his own destruction over the years:

Mortality, that was the trouble! Some people think that millions now living are never going to die. I don't think so - I think it's a misapprehension not borne out by the facts! We go like flies when we come to the end of summer... And who is going to prevent it? (He becomes depressed.) Who - is going - to prevent it! (He nods gravely.) The road is changed. The shoe industry is changed. These times are - revolution!¹³

He admits his failure to make of the present world a home, and assesses the change in these terms:

My point is this: the ALL-LEATHER slogan is not what sells any more - not in shoes, and not in humanity either [emphasis added]¹⁴

The play ends with Charlie giving up in despair at the condition of contemporary man:

It ain't even late in the day any more - (He throws up the blind.) It's NIGHT! (The space of the window is black.)¹⁵

Williams sympathises with Charlie because he shares his evaluation of man's predicament in the present-day world, but he does not share his despair. The alternatives he offers the modern man constitute the basis

13 In Twenty Seven Wagons Full of Cotton, p. 81

14 Ibid., p. 84

15 Ibid., p. 85

of Williams' moral system, a system not widely acceptable as moral, nor even completely original, yet one which develops consistently through his plays.

Significant among the influences that helped him evolve this was D.H. Lawrence whose work and life fascinated Williams at an early stage in his career. He visited Frieda Lawrence in New Mexico in 1939¹⁷, and promised her that he would write a play about Lawrence. Two years later he produced the one-acter suggestively called I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix.¹⁷ It is an "imaginary" portrayal of the last hours of Lawrence as he lay dying in the French rivièra. Contrary to Williams' intentions, the play, taken as a whole, is not very complimentary to Lawrence. "Much of his work," says Williams in his Preface, "is chaotic and distorted by tangent obsessions - [precisely the charge that Williams' own critics level against his work] - ...such as his insistence upon woman's subservience to the male..." [Phoenix, p. 3]. He has Lawrence confess to a pretension to "waging a war with bourgeois conceptions of morality, with prudery, with intellectuality, with all kinds of external forces that aren't external at all. What I'm fighting with really's the old maid in myself..." [Phoenix, p. 9]. Irrespective of the accuracy or

16 Anne Rothe, Current Biography: 1946, p. 645

17 The very brief text of I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix [subsequently abbreviated as Phoenix] was originally published by New Directions, New York, in 1941, in two limited editions, one of them at fifty dollars a copy; a reasonably priced edition - undated - has since been issued by the Dramatists' Play Service, New York. References here are to this latter edition.

or otherwise of the portrait, however, the play illuminates certain affinities between the two writers.

The first article of faith that Williams shares with Lawrence, and which the play illustrates, is a passionate love of "life" despite the stresses of living - particularly in present age - which break down Charlie in Solid Gold Watches. Inevitably connected with this is the question of portraying life in art, and Williams, like Lawrence, is prepared to use any tools, including "violence" (in the artistic sense), that this may require. Williams has Lawrence define art in terms close to his own heart; when Bertha asks Lawrence why he turned to painting -

LAWRENCE: Why did I want to write?

Because I'm an artist. - What is an artist? - A man who loves life too intensely, a man who loves life till he hates her and has to strike out with his fists like I struck at Frieda -

To show her he knows her tricks, and he's still the master!...

Oh, Brett, oh, Frieda -

I wanted to stretch out the long sweet arms of my art and embrace the whole world!

But it isn't enough to go out to the world with love.

The world's a woman you've got to take by storm.

And so I doubled my fist and I struck and I struck.

Words weren't enough - I had to have color, too.

I took to paint and I painted the way that I wrote!

Fiercely, without any shame! [Phoenix, p. 17]

It is a subtle distinction Williams-Lawrence makes between "life" that

18 Lawrence wrote in a letter (January 17, 1913) to Ernest Collings, "My great religion is belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says, is always true." [D.H. Lawrence, The Letters, ed. Aldous Huxley, p. 96]

inspires the artist's unbounded love and "the world" that awakens his fury. The one signifies the eternal in human nature, the other a product of the corrosive time-process: the former represented by the primeval urges, the instincts, the latter by the inhibiting and conditioning "progress" of society.

Almost arising out of this dichotomy, and closely linked with it, is another Lawrence-derived element in Williams' mature drama of which this play provides a foretaste. It is the flesh-and-spirit dialectic voiced on the two sides by the construction that Bertha and Frieda put upon Lawrence's attitude in life and art:

BERTHA: You'd never admit that Lorenzo was a God.

FRIEDA: Having slept with him - No, I wouldn't.

BERTHA: There's more to be known of a person than carnal knowledge.

FRIEDA: But carnal knowledge comes first.

BERTHA: I disagree with you.

FRIEDA: And also with Lawrence, then. He always insisted you couldn't know women until you had known their bodies.

BERTHA: Frieda, I think it is you who kept him so much in the body!...

FRIEDA: You just don't know, the meaning of Lawrence escapes you! In all his work he celebrates the body!

[Phoenix, pp. 12-13]

While he leaves the two women debating the meaning of Lawrence, Williams' own interpretation of it - as well as his departure from it - begins to emerge in a full-length play, You Touched Me! (1946)¹⁹,

19 Date of publication. The play had, however, been written earlier, the unpublished text copyrighted in 1942; performances in Cleveland and Pasadena preceded that of The Glass Menagerie on Broadway. New York production opened late in 1945 - after The Glass Menagerie.

written in collaboration with David Wyndham, and based on a Lawrence story of the same name. It is a bad play, an amorphous dramatic structure, a queer combination of the slapstick and romantic, the farcical and philosophical. Set in the rural English household (plus mock ship cabin) of a hard-drinking, old sea captain, who bartered his ship for a barrel of rum and is living out his years in a world of alcohorent memories and the discordant nagging of a frigid, domineering, virtue-ridden spinster sister, Emmie. The plot gets going when Hadrian, the captain's "charity boy", a young orphan whom he adopted some time ago in order to bring some "LIFE" into the house - in other words some protection against the ominous sister, returns on leave from wartime service as a fighter pilot in the Canadian Air Force. The captain's shy, sensitive, poetically-inclined, Hart Crane-idolising daughter, who has so far been cast - externally at least - in Aunt Emmie's image, finds some life waking in her with the arrival of the sensual young pilot, but the aunt, partly aided by her "spiritual companion", the Reverend Melton, opposes a possible match between Matilda and Hadrian. The girl is much ~~too~~ strongly under Emmie's influence to recognise her own feelings until her father aids Hadrian to claim his bride.

It is interesting to note some of the variations that the play reflects upon the source tale. In the Lawrence story the father is a pottery manufacturer living in a pottery house. In the Williams-Wyndham play it is a retired sea captain living in The Pottery House. The former

is an intelligible realistic setting; the latter is symbolic or else enigmatic, for the play offers no explanation as to who operates or ever operated the pottery plant, unless one construes that the rows of pots in the shed are full of symbolic emptiness. The playwrights describe the house as possessing "a grace and beauty as many things do which nevertheless are not in vital contact with the world." In bringing about this break with the vital world the animate conspire with brick and stone. Emmie, who is the younger sister in the original story, becomes, in the adapted play, a frigid old-maid aunt representing what the authors call "aggressive sterility". Matilda, the 32-year old, large nosed, skinny elder sister becomes the fragile niece, with the "transparent quality of glass", driven through her sensitivity and fear into panic at the approach of passion, yet still capable of being saved by a "touch" in time. Hadrian, Lawrence's scheming common soldier, turns a muscular R.C.A.F. lieutenant with the political zeal of a U.N. Secretary General, and a bagful of pseudo-intellectual discourses on the enlarging "frontiers of the mind". Each character is less human and more symbolic than **its** counterpart in Lawrence's story. The symbolism of characters (as indeed of the action proper - e.g. the simultaneous action in the parlour and the cabin of the ship) is intended to accentuate a conscious division and contrast, the contrast between good and bad. If one is to accept the playwrights' description of the piece as a romantic comedy, then the good must mean the young lovers and those who aid them; and the bad, those who hinder their union.

In other words, Hadrian, Matilda and the Captain stand for the authors' positive values; Emmie and the vicar, for the negative. Williams' collaborator provided another clue to this division by defining the play as "an allegory of the closed versus the open way of life."²⁰ One might go further than that and say that there are the negative enclosing forces - the cloistering home, and the freezing aunt (and her male alter ego, the clergyman) - that so exert themselves as to keep the bud of Matilda's existence from opening; and there are the liberating forces - the flute-playing (phallic worship [?]) airman (free as a bird), champion of universal brotherhood, Hadrian; and the boisterous seaman, still able to relive his adventures and transcend the prison of The Pottery House; who between themselves endeavour to, and succeed in bringing about the blossoming of the bud.

Williams' affirmation of life, like Lawrence's, is manifested through a faith in the nobility of the flesh. Denial of sexual life is, for him, denial of life. But this - despite the confusing mixture of animal and human imagery - must not be interpreted as a plea for an animal existence in human society. For - to put it in negative terms, - what Williams objects to is a conscious, intellectual suppression of the primal sex urge, the self-induced sterility of Emmie, and not the involuntary "fragility" of Matilda. This, in fact, is what distinguishes his treatment of the flesh-spirit theme from Lawrence's. Where Lawrence

20 Rothe, op. cit.

would ruthlessly satirise "aggressive sterility" (Hermione, Clifford Chatterley), Williams is not interested so much in bringing disaster upon Emmie as in releasing and rescuing Matilda. This is partly responsible for the sentimental delineation of the latter in the play. What is clear, at any rate, is Williams' fundamental insistence upon the need for sympathy, love and understanding. The key to the play lies perhaps in its title - the exclamation of happiness that can result from the moment when separateness of human beings is bridged.

SEVERAL of values expressed in You Touched Me are restated with much greater impact in Williams' first independent full-length play - for many still the best-loved of his works - The Glass Menagerie (1945). It is a tender family portrait set in a dismal interior in a Saint Louis slum, presided over by a talkative, possessive but well-meaning matriarch called Amanda Wingfield. Her husband figures only in a super-lifesize photograph over the mantle, and is described as a telephone man who fell in love with long distances and deserted the family, leaving behind a daughter, Laura - a crippled, hypersensitive, shy girl who has retreated into a fantasy world of gramophone records and a menagerie of ornamental animalcules; and a restless son, Tom - a poet by temperament, shoe-factory worker by profession. Amanda, shabby-genteel, fat and old, lives most of the time on her fanciful recollections of the days when, she claims, she led the cotillion at the Governor's ball, and entertained seventeen "gentlemen callers" on a single day...when widows

were "well provided-for"...and young men had "character". A touch of vulgarity and a nagging unreasonableness accompany her faded gentility, but there is, too, a desperate striving to arrange some sort of future for her two children, particularly the daughter. Refusing apparently to admit Laura's shyness and her crippled leg - she likes them to think it is only "a little physical defect" - she forces her to attend church socials where she might find herself a husband; failing there, she has her enroll at a secretarial school where she may learn to become self-supporting; and unsuccessful again, she makes yet another desperate effort by asking Tom to find at his shoe factory some clean-living, non-drinking "gentleman caller" for his sister. From his limited acquaintance at the works Tom invites a big Irishman - non-drinking! - Jim O'Connor to dinner, having said nothing of his sister. The naive, unsuspecting "caller", fired by the all-American urge to "get ahead", turns out to be the hero of Laura's schooldays. Gently but innocently he sparks an illusory expectation of romance in the girl, whirls her in her first dance, but announces in the end that he is engaged to be married to another. Against this, Amanda proceeds with grim maternal determination to set in Laura a sure trap for the young man, succeeding only in making the daughter so sick that she cannot even join them at dinner. Finally disappointed, Amanda tries to blame all the family's failures on Tom, who like his father descends the symbolic fire-escape and joins the merchant navy, while the father grins from the wall at the two deserted women.

Some of the personages of You Touched Me! may not be too difficult to identify in The Glass Menagerie. The figure of Laura has in some ways been developed from that of Matilda; Amanda is vaguely reminiscent of Aunt Emmie; and Tom himself could be a half-brother to the poetic heroine of the earlier play. However, here is none of the tragicomic boisterousness of the captain, the caricature quality of the aunt, or the crude discursiveness of the pilot. In fact, if the result of excessive didacticism and symbolism was to flatten the characters in You Touched Me!, in The Glass Menagerie it is the warm flesh-and-blood humanity of three-dimensional characters that tends to mask the philosophic import of the play. The work can, and has been viewed with one or the other of the two women at the centre of the action. For many people it will remain the "unbearable yet unforgettable" portrait of the mother²¹ as a "Southern Gentlewoman".²² Most producers have cast the best available actress in this role. It may not be a complete exaggeration, in fact, to say that it is partly due to such talents as Laurette Taylor,²³ Helen Hayes,²⁴ and Gertrude Lawrence,²⁵ who have interpreted this character, that Amanda has begun to occupy the prominent position it does in the

21 J.C. Trewin, "Mother and Father", Illustrated London News, CCXIII (August 8, 1948), 250

22 Signi L. Falk devotes most of his section on The Glass Menagerie to a discussion of this character under the heading "The Southern Gentlewoman" in his excellent study, Tennessee Williams (pp. 72-80)

23 In the original Broadway production by Eddie Dowling and Louis J. Singer

24 In the Alan Schneider-John Gielgud New York-London production, 1948

25 In the Warner Brothers film: screenplay by Williams and Peter Barneis

minds of playgoers. Commenting on the enthusiasm of the audience that applauded the opening Broadway performance with the unfamiliar but persistent cries of "Author! Author!" Joseph Wood Krutch wrote:

"Undoubtedly some of it was for the acting and the production, especially for the performance of Laurette Taylor... [in the role] of the pitiful and terrible old woman who is the central figure."²⁶ The author himself, when once asked why he always wrote about "frustrated women", sought support in the performance of an actress, and said: "See Helen Hayes in the London 'The Glass Menagerie' if you still think Amanda is a frustrated spirit!"²⁷ More recently, however, with revivals like Vivian Matalon's in the West End,²⁸ the emphasis seems to have shifted sharply toward Laura. Touched as I myself was by the latter portrayal by Anna Massey — her heart-shaped face, a dionysian mask of total tragedy, above her frail drooping body, still radiating a kind of tenuous, incredulous happiness during moments of her brief communication with life — I had the opportunity of discussing the production with a lady²⁹ who had once played Amanda in another London production. Her main comment was that it was not until she saw the Matalon version that she realised that it was Laura, and not Amanda, who was central to the mood of the play.

26 Krutch, "Drama", Nation, CLX (April 14, 1945), 424

27 Williams, "Questions Without Answers", New York Times, Oct 2, 1948

28 Produced for the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford, at the Haymarket, December, 1965

29 Mrs. Alice Spaul: has made several appearances lately at the Little Theatres in Leicester and Nottingham

Highly engaging as the two characters, individually, are, their proper significance lies in a wider, more integrated vision that the play seeks to present. It is essentially a poetic vision of life in the modern times. The play takes shape from the consciousness of Tom, the poet figure among the characters. Early in the opening scene, Williams defines Tom's position quite clearly: "I am the narrator of the play," says Tom, "and also a character in it. The other characters are my mother, Amanda, my sister, Laura, and a gentleman caller who appears in the final scenes..."³⁰ He is not just another character, but neither is he merely a choric figure. For when he goes on to distinguish the gentleman caller from the rest of the company — "He is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we are somehow set apart from"³¹ — he does more than suggest either a family likeness within the consanguinary group or its isolation from (what E.E. Cummings would call) this so-called world of ours. He is, too, emphasising what he has stated earlier — that the play is "memory", his memory. And while on the one hand Williams using memory as a rationalising device for the fragmentary experience that Tom calls upon the auditor to share, on the other he invests Tom with a fair amount of poetic licence to shape the characters — including the one "realistic" character — so as to fit his (and Williams') general

30 The Glass Menagerie in Tennessee Williams, Four Plays, p. 2 [The title of this volume is abbreviated as 4P in further references.]

31 Ibid.

design. Tom says of O'Connor: "...since I have a poet's weakness for symbols, I am using this character also as a symbol." [4P, p.2]. And it is not only characters but also the "incidents" that Tom recalls that are an amalgam of fact and fancy. Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt thought it was a "flaw in the sequence of his memories" that Tom "could recall the long scene between his sister and the Gentleman Caller unless he and his mother were eavesdropping."³¹ This apparent "improbability" becomes irrelevant if one remembers that Tom is as much the "author" of the play as his creator.

Viewed in this light, as an image of an individually-oriented universe, not unlike O'Neill's, the play acquires its full significance, as a work dealing with one of the comprehensive themes of 20th century arts — the search for identity, the journey toward the meaning of experience. If some of the captain's monologues in You Touched Me! suggested a low-grade distillation of Anna Christie, The Hairy Ape, or O'Neill's other sea pieces, The Glass Menagerie recalls a much more honourable connection with The Great God Brown. For Tom, like Billy Brown, is engaged in making a decision about his ethos, his "style of living".—"...what I'm doing - what I want to do - having a little difference between them" is highly important to him. [4P, p.14]). To help him seek this, Williams endows him with a double consciousness. There is the conscious self — the observing, reflecting Tom who projects the flow of experience from his

31 Wyatt, "The Glass Menagerie", Catholic World, CLXI (May, 1945), 166

memory. This is the Tom who spends hours in the warehouse washroom composing verses, the "Shakespeare", the "author" of the play. But within his stream of consciousness there exists another Tom, the active self, the shoe-factory worker, the deserter of the family. The two coexist in his words, thoughts and imagination:

AMANDA: Where are you going?

TOM: I'm going to the movies!

AMANDA: I don't believe that lie!

TOM (crouching toward her, overtowering her tiny figure.

She backs away, gasping.): I'm going to opium dens!

Yes, opium dens, dens of vice and criminal hangouts,

Mother. I've joined the Hogan gang, I'm a hired

assassin, I carry a tommy-gun in a violin case! They

call me Killer, Killer Wingfield, I'm leading a

double life, a simple honest warehouse worker by day,

by night a dynamic czar of the underworld, Mother...

[4P, p. 15]

The active self struggled for self-expression, or as Tom himself puts it "adventure": the small-alley home, the warehouse, even the movies failed to provide it.

Yes, movies! Look at them - (A wave toward the marvels of Grand Avenue.) All of those glamorous people - having adventures - hogging it all, gobbling the whole thing up! You know what happens? People go to the movies instead of moving! Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America [SIC!!], while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them! Yes, until there's a war. That's when adventure becomes available to the masses! Everyone's dish, not only Gable's....

[4P, p.38]

Even this partial satisfaction is suspect in his mother's eyes. "I don't believe," she says, "that you go to movies every night. Nobody goes to the movies night after night." [4P, p. 14]. She ostracises him for

what she considers his irresponsibility toward his warehouse "career":

What right have you to jeopardize your job?
Jeopardize the security of us all? [Ibid.]

— and insists, with utter lack of understanding, that he must find
"adventure" in this job or do without it:

The world is full of young men employed in warehouses,
and offices and factories.
TOM: Do all of them find adventure in their careers?
AMANDA: They do, or they do without it. Not every body
HAS A CRAZE FOR ADVENTURE...

[4P, p. 21]

She gives him long discourses on how and what he must eat and drink:

Honey, don't push [the food] with your fingers. If you
have to push it with something the thing to use is a
crust of bread. And chew — chew! ...Eat food leisurely,
son, and enjoy it. A well-cooked meal has lots of flav-
ours that must be held in the mouth for appreciation.
So chew your food and give your salivary glands a
chance to function.

[4P, p. 3]

— don't gulp [the coffee]; put cream in [when he
always drinks it black]...

[p. 19]

Promise, son, you'll — never be a drunkard. [Ibid.]

You smoke too much. A pack a day — at fifteen cents
a pack.

[p. 24]

She decides what he is going to wear and what he must look like:

Where is your wool muffler. Put on your wool muffler...

Son, will you do me a favour?

What?

Comb your hair! You look so pretty when your hair is combed.

[p. 24]

Thanks to her, conditions are ideal for Tom, the poet, to relinquish

any hopes of being himself or of leading an adult existence. She tries to engage his helpless interest in promoting the future well-being of his sister, but fails to provide a suitable basis to act without violating his sense of perspective or even decency. She refuses stubbornly to recognise facts as Tom knows them to be. Having invited the one acquaintance he seems to have, and having informed Amanda that the visitor knows nothing about Laura, he warns her —

Mother, you mustn't expect too much of Laura.

AMANDA: What do you mean?

TOM: Laura seems all those things to you and me because she is ours and we love her. We don't even notice she's crippled any more.

AMANDA: Don't say crippled! You know that I never allow that word to be used!

TOM: But face facts, Mother. She is and — that's not all—

AMANDA: What do you mean "not all"?

TOM: Laura is very different from other girls.

AMANDA: I think the difference is all to her advantage.

TOM: Not quite all — in the eyes of others — strangers — she's terribly shy and lives in a world of her own and those things make her seem a little peculiar to people outside the house.

AMANDA: Don't say peculiar....

[4P, pp. 29-30]

When she starts making elaborate preparations (including stuffing the daughter's flat bosom with "gay deceivers") to receive, or rather trap the guest, Tom threatens:

If you're going to make such a fuss, I'll call it off.
I'll tell him not to come.

[p. 27]

but when the Gentleman Caller affair ends in a fiasco, she pounces upon Tom with the vehement accusation:

...now that you've had us make such fools of ourselves

The effort, the preparations, all the expense! The new floor lamp, the rug, the clothes for Laura!... Go to the movies...go to the moon - you selfish dreamer.

[4P, pp. 61-62]

The clue to their incompatibility is provided by an argument that develops over a book Tom brought home and

AMANDA: I took that horrible novel back to the library - yes! That hideous book by that insane Mr. Lawrence. (Tom laughs wildly.) I cannot control the output of diseased minds or people who cater to them - (Tom laughs still more wildly) BUT I WON'T ALLOW SUCH FILTH BROUGHT INTO MY HOUSE! No, no, no, no, no!

The episode in itself is relatively insignificant, but Tom with his "poet's weakness for symbols", seems to have used it symbolically. It highlights the clash of personalities and thereby of certain basic values. For Tom, "Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter..." For Amanda, the very word "instinct" is blasphemy:

Man is by instinct! Don't quote instinct to me!
Instinct is something that people have got away from!
It belongs to animals! Christian adults don't want it!
TOM: What do Christian adults want, then, Mother?
AMANDA: Superior things! Things of the mind and spirit!
Only animals have to satisfy instincts! Surely your aims are somewhat higher than theirs! The monkeys - pigs -
TOM: I reckon they're not.

[4P, p. 21]

Amanda states her distinction between the "animal" and the human more than once [e.g. see p.3]. All her reveries of the great past are coloured by a philosophy of prudery:

When I was a girl in Blue Mountain and it was suspected that a young man drank, the girl whose attentions he had been receiving, if any girl was, would sometimes speak to the minister of his church, or rather her father

would if her father were living, and sort of feel him out on the young man's character. That is the way things are discreetly handled to keep a young woman from making a tragic mistake!

[4P, p. 28]

Her puritanism and bourgeois morality are abhorrent to Tom who wants (to paraphrase Williams' Lawrence) "to take life in his long arms" where she insists on a solitary existence in a dead past, safely removed from the winds of "animal" instincts. One can never be too cautious in interpreting such precious imagery, but it seems there is some evidence in the recurring image of the "moon" to suggest precisely the same "aggressive sterility" in Amanda that was much more obvious in Emmie in You Touched Me! One of her "gentlemen callers" was drowned in the "Moon Lake"; two others duelled at the "Moon Lake Casino"; her most ardent wish — "Success and happiness for my precious children" — is made on the moon [4P, p. 25], and she asks Tom to make his secret wish on the moon as well. Since her past is (and wishes invariably are) a product of imagination, one might presume that the moon — a symbol at once of lunacy and chastity, and impliedly of sterility — looms rather large on the horizon of her subconscious. Her blessings on her children are thus ironically curses of sterility. The irony becomes more plain when, at the end of the play, she literally hurls the curse upon Tom: "...Go to the moon - you selfish dreamer...!" [op. cit.] It may not be wrong to presume, too, that it was her denial of "animal" instincts - including sex - rather than the "long distances" with which he is supposed to have fallen in love, that sent her husband

on his journey to adventure.

Amanda, then, is not a compatible mask for Tom. His sensitive sister, who is "like a piece of her own glass collection", descends - as has been suggested above - from Matilda with her "delicate, almost transparent quality of glass". She is, like Matilda, a personification of poetry and illusion, and might, as such, be expected to offer Tom a "style of life". But being convinced of the horror of her isolation, she has sought the traditional Wingfield solution—escape. She escapes into her glass menagerie and identifies herself with the "freakish" unicorn. It is not, however, her limp that is the whole cause of her resignation. This becomes clear if one turns to an early short story, "Portrait of a Girl in Glass",³² where Williams first conceived of this character. The Laura of the story is an abnormally diffident girl, hiding in her room from where two windows open on to an areaway called Death Valley where a vicious chow traps the defenceless kittens and tears them to pieces. Keeping the blinds drawn, Laura maintains a perpetual twilight in the room, and keeps herself busy cleaning her little glass animals and a few souvenirs left behind by her father who has deserted the family. Significantly, she is NOT a cripple. Now in the play the narrative symbolism of the slaughter of the kittens disappears; and, instead, the limp is introduced as a theatrical symbol of her fragmentary nature. But the analogy

32 In One Arm and Other Stories, pp. 97-112

between Death Valley and the crude, insensitive modern world remains as valid as it is obvious. What really keeps Laura isolated from the world is her sensitiveness and the fear of being hurt by an unfeeling humanity. But un-understanding, if not unfeeling, humanity is present right inside the house. For, to a large extent, Amanda's hard presence, ever threatening her brittle fragility, is responsible for this withdrawal. Early in the opening scene, it becomes evident how Amanda's garrulous account of her supposedly romantic youth only intensifies Laura's sense of inadequacy. [Amanda has just finished one of her unending tales of Blue Mountain, when she suddenly seems to remember the presence of her unfortunate audience]:

AMANDA: ...Stay fresh and pretty. It's almost time for our gentlemen callers to start arriving. (She flounces girlishly toward the kitchenette.) How many do you suppose we're going to entertain this afternoon?

TOM throws down the paper and jumps up with a groan.

LAURA (alone in the dining room): I don't believe we're going to receive any, Mother.

AMANDA (reappearing, airily): What, no one - not one? You must be joking! (Laura nervously echoes her laugh. She slips in a fugitive manner through the half-open portières and draws them gently behind her. A shaft of very clear light is thrown on her face against the faded tapestry of the curtains.)

Not one gentleman caller? It can't be true! There must be a flood, there must have been a tornado!

LAURA: It isn't a flood, it's not a tornado, Mother. I'm just not popular like you were in Blue Mountain...

[4P, p, 6]

Amanda aggravates the malady by forcing her into a confrontation with the world she dreads. Laura tries to comply with her wishes because she cannot imagine hurting anyone:

AMANDA: You did all this to deceive me, just for deception?
...Why?

LAURA: Mother, when you're disappointed, you get that awful suffering look on your face, like the picture of Jesus' mother in the museum!

Herself she keeps getting worse and worse. The secretarial course is only one of the blows to her little capacity to face the world. As Amanda learns from the instructor:

Her [Laura's] hands shook so that she couldn't hit the right keys! The first time we gave a speed test, she broke down completely — was sick at the stomach and had to be carried away into the washroom!

[4P, p. 8]

Amanda tries, too, to impose upon Laura her own marvellous ability to ignore facts:

Nonsense, Laura, I've told you never, never to use that word ["crippled"]....

[4P, p. 11]

So completely is her faith in the world shattered that she is terrified when she learns that a man she secretly admired at school is to be the gentleman caller.

There was a Jim O'Connor we both knew in high school - (then with effort). If that is the one Tom is bringing to dinner — you'll have to excuse me, I won't come to table.

[4P, p. 34]

Shaking with fright she hobbles, in all obedience, to answer the door, only to confirm what the brother knows too well - that her crippled foot is "not all". Although her development is the result, not of active choice, but of recognition, partly forced upon her by her well-

wishing mother, she remains - to Tom's active self, and in his experiential contact with her - a descendent of Amanda's vision of the world, far removed from Tom's, because removed from the mainstream of life.

The life role that the active Tom does choose is the absent father. "I'm like my father," he tells Jim, "the bastard son of a bastard. See how he grins? And he's been absent going on sixteen years!" [4P, p.39]. This, his father's ability to smile in the face of life is what appeals to Tom, and he decides to "follow in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space..." John Gassner said of this choice: "Tom's going out into the world was a necessary and wholesome measure of self-preservation; it is one of humanity's inalienable traits and obligations to try to save itself as best it can."³²

But Tom, one must remember, has the sensibility of a poet. (His versifying - or later taking to the sea - is actually unimportant, for as will be seen in subsequent discussion of some of his other plays, Williams' artist does not have to write or paint or perform: it is the temperament that makes him an artist.) And for a poet or artist love of life transcends self-preservation - in the narrow personal sense, at any rate. His active self may have left behind the nagging mother and the sick sister, but the reflective self cannot but look back and see

33 Gassner, "Tennessee Williams: Dramatist of Frustration", College English, X (October, 1948), 1-7

what was not quite apparent at the time. Distanced from experience by time - "the longest distance between two places" [p. 62] - he now has a fuller, more comprehensive, more balanced view of events. The incisive unreasonableness of the mother appears in a different light. She seems less abnormal than she did at the time he was with her. She is, in fact, no worse than any one else including himself: a product largely of circumstance. For the background to the family tragedy was a crisis in society: the depression decade was teetering on the brink of the Second War; "the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind...their eyes had failed them or they had failed their eyes and so they were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery braille of a dissolving economy" while the Spaniards were being methodically slaughtered at Guernica. [4P, p. 2]. Loneliness was epidemic. People were seeking "compensation for lives that passed like mine without change or adventure." [4P, p. 24]. Recollection of personal involvement in the social malady whispers gentleness into his censure of his mother. Her excessive solicitude for her children begins to make sense. The urgency of her concern must have been enhanced by the fact of the father's absence. And he recalls the secret she once betrayed to him, that regardless of what she said about him, she had loved her husband. [4P, p. 20]. In any case, the solicitude was as genuine as it was urgent. "I mean," she says, "that as soon as Laura has somebody to take care of her, married, a home of her own, independent - why, then you'll be free to go wherever you please, on land,

on sea, whichever way the wind blows you!" [4P, p. 22]. Even her affected complacency begins to explain itself. For instance, all through the action she protests against the use of the word "cripple", but when all her efforts fail she finds it unnecessary to continue the pretence she had assumed in order not to dishearten the daughter in pursuit of a suitor. Tom perceives that she was, in fact, torn by a conflict within herself, much greater than her conflict with him, that is, her idealistic struggle to recover a dead past and the necessity of survival in an unfriendly present.

He sees, too, the pressures under which his sister assumed her receding stance. This is where the scene between Laura and Jim makes sense: it was not observed by a peeping Tom – perhaps it was never observed at all, but rather reconstructed imaginatively by the poet in him. Laura was not incapable of being awakened to life, including sensual life, for when the virile Jim made the gesture of sharing in her private little world, she responded warmly to the momentary communion. What failed her was the ill-chance that it was the supposedly betrothed Jim rather than another. No wonder he

tried and tried to leave [her] behind, but I am more faithful than I intended to be!...I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger – anything that can blow your candles out! – for nowadays the world is lit by lightning! Blow out your candles, Laura...

The Glass Menagerie has a mysterious beauty about it that defies analysis, and after the long – almost too long – explication above one fears, but knows, that its ethereal quality remains unpalpable. But one

indelible impression that Tom Wingfield's poetic exploration into his experience leaves is of a larger-than-life compassion for human existence at its most ordinary.

THIS gentle poignancy sets into sharp relief the severity of treatment and detail in Williams' next play, A Streetcar Named Desire (1947). It is a tale told with all the sound and fury of a major elemental confrontation. Raw colours and primitive motifs characterise its details. A haunted, fragile heroine makes her last desperate effort to "escape" - as she thinks - only to find herself in a world of stark primal forces, and to meet her nemesis in a forced sexual encounter with a man she considers no more than a beast.

Blanche DuBois is the last remnant and daughter of an aristocratic Southern plantation home. Married in her teens to a handsome, Shelleyan "ariel" young man, she finds him one day actually engaged in the homosexual act. Her discovery, followed by a single expression of disgust, drives the boy to suicide. The failure of the marriage and of family fortune, and a series of "expensive" deaths in the house, compel her to engage as an English teacher in a school. But loss of security, of love and marriage, of companionship, and above all of a "Way of life", sets in her a neurotically defensive reaction, manifested in nymphomaniac relationships with her pupils, and a whoring promiscuity in town. To her previous losses, then, is added the loss of her reputation, and with it her job and livelihood.

Literally driven away by the small town she lived in, she comes, as the play opens, to seek refuge with a younger sister, Stella, who lives with her Polish-American husband in what strikes Blanche as an utterly unfashionable section of New Orleans. A dream of a past of refinement and culture (symbolised by the simulation furs and imitation jewellery, and the dead poet-husband's love letters packed in her coffin-bag) is all her luggage as she alights the streetcar named "Cemetries" in "Elysian Fields".³⁴ She almost torments her relatives with her airs of respectability and her image of herself as a high-bred, sought-after, strait-laced young lady; with her surprise at the discovery that her sister, another descendant of "Belle Reve", has complacently reconciled to the blowsy happiness of a misalliance with the coarse, primitive, almost bestial ex-sergeant, machine salesman, Stanley Kowalski. The latter resents, and grows suspicious of, her pretensions, and sets out to conjugate the acts in her past-imperfect. His antagonism makes her even more desparate, and before long coincidence provides her the right man (Mitch - a friend of Stanley's) whom she wants to marry, but the brother-in-law discloses the facts of her life to her suitor, and wrecks her hopes. One night, as Stella lies in labour in a hospital, and Blanche is drowning her sorrows in Stanley's liquor, the latter comes home drunk for the joy of paternity, and brutally rapes Blanche, unhing-

34 Harold Clurman points out that "Desire" and "Cemetries" are actual names of streetcars in New Orleans, and the latter does actually ply to the neighbourhood called "Elysian Fields" [Clurman, Lies Like Truth, p. 73]

ing whatever mental equilibrium she is left with. Returning home, Stella is persuaded that Blanche's story of the rape is a product of her insanity and that she must be committed to an institution. As Blanche dresses to leave, as if for dinner with Shep Huntleigh, a "former beau" of hers, a quite different suitor calls for her - a doctor from the asylum. Clinging to his arm she leaves quietly, "Whoever you are — I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."

Williams called Streetcar "a play of incomprehension". Ironically, the description can be applied in more than one sense. For instance, such motifs as Blanche's nymphomania, her prostitution and final rape by Stanley, her young husband's homosexuality, as well as her "madness", have provided the basis at once for theatrical sensation and critical under-estimation. This might seem contrary to the intentions of the author as well as his theatrical collaborators. For Elia Kazan, who directed the original New York production, described (to himself) the theme of the play as follows:

...this is a message from the dark interior. The little twisted, pathetic, confused bit of light and culture puts out a cry. It is snuffed out by the crude forces of violence, insensibility and vulgarity which exist in our South. And this cry is the play.³⁵

Emphasising the importance of Blanche's inner life, Kazan wrote in his "notebook" that her problem had to do with "her tradition... She is

35 Kazan, "Notebook for 'A Streetcar Named Desire'," in Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, eds., Directing the Play, p. 296

stuck with [an] ideal."³⁶ Harold Clurman, in some ways one of the progenitors of l'ecole Kazan and undoubtedly appreciative of the work of a former Group Theatre colleague, found that (possibly because of miscasting) the American production did not achieve the intended effect. The culture-and-tradition aspect of Blanche's role did not quite come off in Jessica Tandy's interpretation.

When Blanche appeals to her sister in the name of these values, Miss Tandy is unable to make it clear whether she means what she says and whether we are supposed to attach any importance to her speech or whether she is merely spinning another fantasy. It is essential to the play that we believe and are touched by what she says, that her emotion convinces us of the soundness of her values.

About Marlon Brando's Stanley, Clurman had the opposite complaint:

The combination of an intense, introspective and almost lyrical personality under the mask of a bully endows the character with something almost touchingly painful ...The play becomes a triumph of Stanley Kowalski with the collusion of the audience which is no longer on the side of the angels.³⁷

Whether the producers intended it or not, the Olivier production in London and the Cocteau adaptation-production, Un Tramway Nommé Desir in Paris, also shared the sensational quality of the New York original. In Britain it was sponsored by the Arts Council and granted a tax-free run as a cultural offering by a non-profit making producer. But despite the night-long queues outside the Phoenix, the reviews read like: "I feel as if I had crawled through a garbage heap...", "Blatant, crude, sex..."

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Clurman, Lies Like Truth, pp. 77-78

and some critics demanded an airing in Parliament over the question of tax exemption for a work of such depravity.

This type of criticism may appear surprising if the only basis for it were the inclusion within the thematic structure of elements of sexual perversion. For sexual delinquency has been an element of the theme in Western drama ever since Oedipus Rex through Shakespeare into the modern times. Within America, O'Neill's Anna Christie had preceded the Williams play by a quarter of a century. The hidden fact that explains the Streetcar chatter is that between even the directorial conception and its execution on stage there is a wide gap that the audience cannot be expected to bridge nor the critics blamed for measuring out.

The theatrical mask is, however, only the most apparent one that obscures the deeper meaning of the play. There are, too, textual masks - layers of them - that push the ethical ramifications of the play into the background. Eric Bentley, reviewing the 1949 run (with Anthony Quinn instead of Brando, and Uta Hagen instead of the English Miss Tandy) found it a much more faithful rendering of the text, but regretted that the ending - Blanche being led off to the asylum - was not as convincing as in the original production. "Jessica Tandy's Blanche," wrote Bentley, "was more or less mad from the start. Uta Hagen's is driven mad by Kowalski..."³⁸ It is an either-or choice that the players have

38 "Back to Broadway," Theatre Arts, XXXIII (November, 1949), 14

to make, and in Blanche's case particularly, the actress is forced to falsify either the action or the reflection that the character is endowed with. Surely part of the responsibility for this precarious balance must rest with the playwright.

Yet another factor that contributes to the "incomprehension" of this "play of incomprehension" is the style of characterisation. In the first instance, as Bentley admits, Williams produces vital, realistic portraits, which tend to keep one's interest engaged at the psychological level and reduce the play to a case history. Secondly, there are apparent ambiguities too obvious to invite deeper analysis. Take Stanley for instance: first the playwright's ecstatic account:

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

[4P, pp. 77-78]

Now Blanche's distracted denunciation of him:

He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, talks like one! There's even something - sub-human - something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something - ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I've seen in - anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he

is - Stanley Kowalski - survivor of the stone age!
 Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle!
 And you - you [Stella] here - waiting for him! Maybe
 he'll strike you or maybe he'll grunt and kiss you!
 That is, if kisses have been discovered yet! Night
 falls and the other apes gather! There in front of the
 cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing
 and hulking! His poker night! - you call it - this party
 of apes!...God! Maybe we are a long way from being made
 in God's image, but Stella - my sister - there has been
some progress since then! And in some kinds of people
 some tender feelings have had some little beginning!
 That we have got to make grow! And cling to, and hold
 as our flag!...Don't - don't hang back with the brutes!

[4P, pp. 104-05]

An auditor in the playhouse, fortunately, hears only the speeches of the characters, and is not confounded with such clear-cut definitions as the one embodied in the stage direction quoted above. For the reader, however, the contradiction implied in the two accounts affects his whole approach to the play. If he is expected, as Williams' colleagues and supporters seem to suggest, to take Blanche seriously, then the playwright's own description of the character must appear as sensational and sentimentalised as, for instance, Brando's reconstruction of it. On the other hand, if the playwright is definitive about him, Blanche cannot but appear already deranged to read the above meaning in her antagonist, and she cannot be suspected to have any higher values than those of a pretentious "boozy prostitute" that she has often been thought to be. In any case, judged by traditional criteria, in terms of the play's action, she cannot be accepted as a tragic figure: she is already past the point of tragic crisis before the action of the play begins, and is awaiting the coup de grace; the traumatic moment of her

truth is only reflected in her struggle to escape a doom which is already upon her before the play opens.

At any rate, the "incomprehension" that Williams refers to is the one between Blanche and Stanley, and if this is recognised, the two descriptions of Stanley no more seem incongruous. Rather they supplement and illuminate each other. Williams' lyrical account unmistakably recalls the Lawrentian fox, beautifully alive in the flesh. And Blanche's angry outburst only reveals another facet of him — the limited intellect and delicacy. The fact that she overstates her case shows her lack of comprehension. For she, too, occupies a recognisable position in the Lawrence-Williams pantheon:

Her appearance is incongruous to [Stanley's world]... She is daintily dressed in a white fluffy bodice, necklace and ear-rings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district... 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.

[4P, p.69]

The fox and the moth cannot understand each other, and the failure results in the destruction of the latter. For assuming this mutual incomprehension as well as Stanley's character, the fact that he overhears Blanche's condemning account of him should not seem too casual a motivation for his cruel exposure of her sordid past to Mitch, or even his brutal rape.

However, the conflict in the play is not a straightforward one of personalities, or of lack of understanding between two contrary indivi-

-duals. For beneath the personal level there rages a critical struggle between ways of life. Unlike The Glass Menagerie, Streetcar has a primarily social frame of reference, for individual choices affect the entire world which the characters inhabit. On the one hand, Blanche's life order (or disorder) has, in some measure, been dictated by the circumstances she has inherited:

There are thousands of papers [she tells Stanley], stretching back over hundreds of years, affecting Belle Reve as, piece by piece, our grandfathers and father and uncles and brothers exchanged the land for their epic fornications - to put it plainly! ...Till finally all that was left - and Stella can verify that! - was the house itself and about twenty acres of ground, including a graveyard, to which all but Stella and I have retreated...

[4P, p. 86]

But the forbears' retreat to their own graveyard has not left her life untouched:

I, I, I took the blows in my face and my body! All of those deaths! The long parade to the graveyard! Father, mother! Margaret, that dreadful way! So big with it, it couldn't be put in a coffin! But had to be burned like rubbish! You just came home in time for funerals, Stella. And funerals are pretty compared to deaths. Funerals are quiet, but deaths - not always. Sometimes their breathing is hoarse, and sometimes it rattles, and sometimes they even cry out to you, "Don't let me go!" Even the old, sometimes say, "Don't let me go." As if you were able to stop them! But funerals are quiet, with pretty flowers. And, oh, what gorgeous boxes they pack them away in! Unless you were there at the bed when they cried out, "Hold me!" you'd never suspect there was the struggle for breath and bleeding. You didn't dream, but I saw! Saw! Saw! And now you sit there telling me with your eyes that I let the place go! How in hell do you think all that sickness and dying was paid for? Death is expensive, Miss Stella!

[4P, p. 76]

On the other hand, her moral choices as well as Stanley's continue to affect the lives of others — Stella's, Mitch's and his mother's, even the unborn Kowalski child's. The mortal combat that Blanche and Stanley engage in derives significance from the fact that it is a fight for the lives of all these people. Blanche is important, not only as herself, but as a symbol, for instance, of the traditional values which no longer exert any potent force in the modern world. She is the last tenant of the Belle Reve of the past and she is dedicated to preserve that dream in a world to which it is completely alien. The world in which she finds herself will not accommodate her dreams, and Blanche is constantly reminded of the lack of romance in the modern world. To reach Stella's Elysian Fields, she must take the two streetcars, "Desire" and "Cemeteries", and the place itself is no Elysium, but eventually proves the last circle of hell as far as she is concerned. Her tragic weakness, however, is that she does not profit by her daily disillusionments. She holds futilely to an ideal dream of the past and denies the evidence of the real world about her. She is the parrot in her own joke [4P, pp. 128-29] who could not be put to sleep during the day by covering the cage and making him believe it was night. This refusal to face reality deceived her into marriage with Alan, whose homosexuality she chose not to see. She sought an ideal, pure, spiritual marriage free from the encroachment of matter. Her inability to maintain her balance when the truth of facts became evident is her weakness and the weakness of the world she represents.

Her tragedy is that of a person too ideally pure to be convinced of the reality of sin. Her dream of the nobility of the soul precludes making friends with the mammon of inequity. The shock of perceiving the world of the flesh is too great for her to absorb. Her promiscuity is her clumsy attempt to allay the promptings of the devil in the flesh. She is conditioned to extremes and her excessive idealism transforms itself into excessive sexuality without her being able to control it. Her dualism makes her believe in the separateness of body and spirit, so that when she experiences the promptings of flesh her guilt is such that she falls into complete abandon in an attempt to escape and forget. Thus the more she falls into promiscuity the more perfect, spiritually, she tries to believe herself to be. Her final speech addressed to the doctor from the asylum fits her perfectly for it serves not only her dream of her spiritual gentility, but is also the truth of her physical activity.

If Blanche serves the spirit, Stanley serves the body; where she believes in tradition, he denies it and seeks only the present and the future. For Stanley everything has a material value; and Blanche measures him against her ideal, of which Alan is the tragic and ironic example. Stanley has none of the poetic sensibility of the soul mate. He is interested only in bodily gratification: bowling, fighting, eating, drinking and sexual intercourse determine his standard of values. The polarities are best appreciated in the attitudes of the two toward the human phenomenon of desire. When Stella explains her reconciliation,

after the poker night fight, with her husband, "...there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark - that sort of make everything else seem - unimportant," she is challenging the sister's superiority, but Blanche retorts with conviction: "What you are talking about is brutal desire - Desire! - the name of that rattle-trap streetcar that bangs through the quarter..." [4P, pp. 103-4]. For her it is a form of love rising solely from the body and, therefore, alien to spiritual love. For Stanley, Desire is the norm, the streetcar that takes ~~him~~ home, to his sensual Elysium, the "colored lights" of sensual reality which Blanche cannot face and has to cover with oriental lanterns.

The reason why we are called upon to take Blanche seriously is not simply to evoke sympathy for her. Of course, the author is sympathetic toward her, but his poetic compassion does not blind his objectivity. In fact, he insists on calling attention to her rhetoric because, with the action of the play beginning at a late stage in her story, it is largely through her own speeches that he reveals her inner nature, her conflicting roles as schoolteacher, Southern belle, poet, sister, saviour and prostitute. It is she who states the strongest case against herself by telling the whole truth: Stanley's "discoveries" are motivated by spite and vengeance, but Blanche's own statements, despite the self-defence implied in them, remain the most complete account of her progressive disintegration. For instance, although she claims that her downward journey had begun even before the moment of her conception,

in the acts of her ancestors, she does not deny her own responsibility for her suffering and the suffering of others in which she has been involved. In a moment of partial enlightenment she confesses to Mitch that she was the effective cause of her adored husband's death:

He'd stuck the revolver into his mouth, and fired...It was because - on the dance-floor - unable to stop myself - I'd suddenly said - "I know! I know! You disgust me..." And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this - kitchen - candle...

[4P, p. 121]

It is not, as has sometimes been suggested, that Williams has extended the Lawrentian approval of sexual vitality to include homosexuality and so decided to punish Blanche for Allan's death. Yet her action does constitute, in Williams' system of morality, a guilty choice inasmuch as she failed by (a) not facing up to reality, and insisting on having the idealised Allan or none at all; (b) by withdrawing sympathy from a morally helpless being, thus doing violence to even her own poetic nature the first pre-requisite of which, according to Williams, is human understanding; (c) by destroying life on any provocation. It is her cruelty that she must atone for. But she persists in her devotion to a dream and denial of reality, her adherence to the dead past and rejection of the living present, and above all, her suppression of Desire at its purest equivalent, in Williams' ethic, to a negation of the life-giving force. Even as she tells Mitch of her mistaken past, she repeats its pattern in the present. Only a moment earlier, she has given free rein to her aberration by literally dragging the Evening Star boy

indoors for a kiss [pp. 112-13], and this was followed by the sad reflection, "...but I've got to be good and keep my hands off children" [p. 113]. Soon, however, the real man as well as the real moment arrives, and doubtless her desire - much more legitimate this time - is upon her. — (She is as close to accepting the "body" as she has ever done: she admires Mitch's "physique", urges him to take off his jacket and loosen his collar, and when he feels embarrassed at the way he perspires, she says, "Perspiration is healthy. If people didn't perspire they would die in five minutes." [p. 116]) — For these few moments (she says) —

I want to create - joie de vivre! I'm lighting a candle.
MITCH: That's good.

BLANCHE: We are going to be very Bohemian. We are going to pretend ... Je suis la Dame aux Camellias! Vous êtes - Armand! Understand French?

MITCH: Naw, Naw, I —

BLANCHE: Voulez-vous couchez [sic.] avec moi ce soir? Vous ne comprenez pas? Ah, quel dommage!

Domage vraiment! for her misplaced spirituality has already overtaken her, and she hits hard on her own emotion and slams the window on the vital universe —

I mean, it's a damned good thing... [p. 116]

— and slips back into

her dream world with a tumbler of whisky. By rejecting Desire (and, therefore, life) she is leaving but one alternative open to her - the opposite of "Desire" which, she knows, is "Cemetery" - and her attempt to turn away from this second alternative is futile. Even as she struggles, in a later scene, to regain Mitch's love by giving him the whole truth,

a Mexican woman announces her fate, standing across the stage, selling flowers for the dead: "Flores para los muertos," she calls, "flores - flores" [p. 138], and Blanche recognises her doom, crying "Fire! Fire! Fire!" [139].

Stanley's position might be justified on the flimsy grounds that he offers Stella a more "normal" life than the Belle Rêve dream; or, perhaps, that in some sense he is the agent who avenges Allan's death, but that is really stretching the point too far. It would be nearer the truth to say that he is as guilty, in crucifying Blanche, as she has been in regard to her husband. For Blanche is now as helpless a fugitive as her husband was at the time of his suicide. And Stanley, on the one hand, the seed bearer, the life giver, is, on the other, the brutal male torturer of a lonely spirit.

Despite the comprehensive and effective explication of the various moral possibilities, therefore, both sets of values remain in themselves unacceptable — Stanley's, because he is incapable of the slightest compromise ("Everyman," he knows, "is a king"); and Blanche's, because her cycle of suffering never progresses to the point of clear resolution, she "dies" and we are at best left with the vague promise of a new life in Stella's unborn child — and A Streetcar Named Desire, a brilliant dramatic achievement, remains, as a moral essay, inconclusive.

SUMMER AND SMOKE (1948) is an extension of the sex duel between, as the title indicates, the hot passion of summer and that "immaterial something - as thin as smoke," the life of the soul. The division of the play into two parts might suggest "Summer" and "Smoke" as its two moods: the season that throws light on the reality of human life and on human happiness, and the artificial condition created by man in which his own vision is obscured. Pursuing the first metaphor, one finds the substantial, subtropical sensuality embodied in a virile young medico, John Buchanan, Jr., assistant to his father who is the town G.P. in Glorious Hill, Mississippi, in the early 1900's. Williams characterises him as "a Promethean figure, brilliantly and restlessly alive in a stagnant society. The excess of his power has not yet found a channel. If it remains without one, it will burn him up." [4P, p. 163]

At the opposite pole is the heroine, sensitive, virginal music teacher, daughter of the local priest, the authoritarian Rev Winemiller, whose wife has disgraced him by receding into "a state of perverse childhood" so that the father and daughter have had to "bear a cross" since Alma was a child. In other words, Alma has had to make her moral choices early in life, and the values she has imbibed are the traditional, humanistic, and spiritual. ("Alma", she says, is the Spanish for "Soul".)

"She seems to belong to a more elegant age, such as the eighteenth century in France" [4P, p. 168]. Their values permeate the very set of the play, which comprises their two homes, the rectory and the surgery, on each side of the stage, suggesting a lifelong neighbourhood, with

a life-size chart of human anatomy³⁹ hanging in the doctor's study, and the whole scene dominated by a statue of "Eternity" with a drinking fountain, merging with the vast cyclorama of the blue summer sky. The curtain rises on the Prologue showing Alma and John as children under the statue, and the two-hour traffic that ensues is a long metaphysical debate between the two conflicting ways of life. It is given flesh-and-blood by the mutual relationship of the two characters. Ever since childhood, Alma has loved John. When he returns home with a medical diploma, a lusty, forthright young man whose father denounces him as a drunkard and a libertine, he is intrigued by the girl, toys with her in an off-hand manner, while she, true to her inner self which outwardly makes her seem a snob and a prig, rejects his coarse advances without withdrawing her love. The climax is reached when John, taking advantage of his father's absence during an epidemic in another community, wastes his time in an orgy of lust with a local beauty, shapely but shady. This drives Alma to call his father back, and in the ensuing fracas the old man is shot by some of John's dubious associates. The impact of incidents shocks the young doctor into reconsidering his ways, while Alma suffers a nervous breakdown. They emerge with the tables turned, she, willing to meet him on his physical plane, he, partially adjusted to seek her on her previous higher plane. As Alma puts it, it is as if they had exchanged calls on each other, and each had found the other away.

39 "Chart of Anatomy" was, indeed, the title originally intended for the play.

A mutual fulfilment is out of the question. The doctor goes into the readier and more realistic embraces of the exuberant, teenage Nellie, a former pupil of Alma's and daughter of a woman of doubtful reputation, while Alma, converted to the "senses", steps out with a passing salesman she meets under the statue.

Following rigidly the Lawrentian "celebration of the body" commitment, one might interpret the play's ending as a punishment meted out to Alma as an act of poetic justice for her rejection of the life of the senses, her "puritanical repression", her unnatural attempt to substitute a great deal of cultured talk for natural instinct. This is precisely how John Buchannan presents his case against her. In his ironic "anatomy lecture" he shouts at Alma:

And down here's the lowest bird - or maybe the highest, who knows? - Yes, take a good look at him, too; he's hungry, too, hungry as both the others and twice as lonesome! What's he hungry for? - Love! There they are, all on the chart. Three birds, three hungry birds on one tall withering tree! Yes, a withering tree they can't fly out of!

John apparently alludes to his own loneliness, and his need for love as a relief from it, but he clearly implies that spiritual fulfilment must be sought through sexual union, for he goes on to accuse Alma:

You've fed none of them, nothing! Well, maybe the middle bird, the practical bird, the belly, a little - watery substance. - But love? Or truth? Nothing - nothing but hand-me-down notions - attitudes - poses!

[4P, p. 209]

The situation suggests a remote, allegorical parallel to Blanche's withdrawal from Allan in his moment of most desperate need. This is further

borne out by the fact that it is Alma who is indirectly responsible for precipitating the end of John's father. For these "sins", Alma might appear to be suffering the torments of the urges she has turned away from, and in the final scene she may seem to be on the threshold of Blanche's world after the gunshots at the casino.

In all fairness, however, it must be admitted that Alma's motivation in recalling John's father is not cruelty – it is not even jealousy: on the contrary, she has a genuine concern for the well-being of the young man she loves, and she acts out of the noblest motives. She wishes to see John in the image of his father:

ALMA (ecstatically): To be a doctor! And deal with these mysteries under the microscope lens... I think it is more religious than being a priest! There is so much suffering in the world it actually makes one sick to think about it, and most of us are so helpless to relieve it... But a physician! Oh, my! And with your father's example to inspire you! Oh, my!

[4P, p. 169]

When she finds him falling short of this ideal, she tries, at first, to infuse him with some of her own enthusiasm:

...And the pity of it is that you are preparing to be a doctor. You're intending to practise your father's profession here in Glorious Hill. (She catches her breath in a sob.) While he is devoting himself to the fever at Lyon you drive your automobile at a reckless pace from one disorderly roadhouse to another! And you – a gifted doctor – Magna cum Laude! (She turns aside, touching her eyelids with a handkerchief.) You know what I call it? I call it deseccration!

[4P, p. 174]

Alma has often been accused of speaking "like a book", but one has to remember that her ideals are invariably based on living examples, in

this case, the example of John's own father. When she finds her own exhortations falling on deaf ears, she turns to the last resort of telephoning the old man. In any case, John's own "complicity" in the father's death is much greater. For one thing, he is a symbolic negation of the values of the old doctor; for another, it is his shady associates who fire the actual shot.[4P, p. 207].

As for Alma's "denial" of the senses, a closer look at the Casino episode (Scene VI) would dispel any such misgivings. What Alma disapproves of is sex without love. She tells John of the three young men she has gone out with before him: "...with each one there was a desert between us,"

JOHN: What was the trouble?

ALMA: I - I didn't have my heart in it....None of them really engaged my serious feelings..... [But now that the "feelings" are really "engaged"]

(JOHN leans over and lifts her veil.)

ALMA: What are you doing that for?

JOHN: So that I won't get your veil in my mouth when I kiss you.

ALMA....: Do you want to do that?

JOHN (gently): Miss Alma. (He takes her arms and draws her to her feet.) Oh, Miss Alma, Miss Alma! (He kisses her.)

ALMA....: Not "Miss" any more. Just Alma. [4P, pp. 197-98]

Valuable as it is to her, her virginity is no barrier to her emotions when she is convinced they are genuine. Her concept of love does not exclude the body, but includes a good deal else besides.

Since you have spoken so plainly, I'll speak plainly, too. There are some women who turn a possibly beautiful thing into something no better than the coupling of beasts!- but love is what you bring to it.

JOHN: You're right about that.

ALMA: Some people bring just their bodies. But there are some people, there are some women, John - who can bring their

hearts to it, also - who can bring their souls to it.
JOHN: Souls again, huh? - those Gothic cathedrals you dream of.

[4P, p. 199; emphasis added]

A certain degree of social inhibition does mark Alma's speech, conduct and thought. She rebukes her infantile mother for making public her love for the doctor [p. 181]; she can reconcile to using her comic literary club virtually as a trap for John's attentions [Scene III]... but a character without contradictions - especially one designed to argue a "case" - would lose all semblance of "humanity", and, at any rate, her highest ideals, inspired, one must insist, by actual achievements of the human spirit, more than redeem these contradictions. In her description of the cathedrals that John so confidently derides, she gives voice not only to her own soul, but to wider and loftier human aspiration to perfection:

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

[4P, p. 197]

These humanist symbols are, of course, incomprehensible to John - except perhaps as phallic symbols - for despite his higher social status and superior schooling, he is essentially another Stanley Kowalski, with nothing but contempt for the historical, cultural and traditional past,

being absolutely certain of the finality of his fundamental ethic of the primal man. Alma, on the other hand, is not as sure of her stand, and she can admit of doubt:

I've thought many times of something you told me last summer, that I have a doppleganger. I looked that up and I found that it means another person inside me, another self, and I don't know whether to thank you for making me conscious of it.

[4P, p. 220]

Buchanan lacks even this degree of self-awareness and is driven entirely by his demons of desire to an inevitable destruction. A primitive figure though he is, he represents better than any L.S.D. addict the disintegration in modern society. The tragedy is not that he is what he is — a failure as a doctor, as a son, and as a human being — for he, as an individual, is somewhat redeemed in the end. The tragedy lies in the fact that the moral failures of John Buchanan are still more acceptable to society than the spiritual eccentricities of Alma. Ironically it is Alma — who gives expression to all that the ideals that modern society proudly claims allegiance to: fidelity, filial piety, selflessness, discipline, love of truth, and an inspired sense of dedication to human service — who is eventually destroyed. It would be wrong, however, that Williams is still suffering from his "rather bad attack of Lawrence in the head" and is, in giving Alma's career this ending, "celebrating the body". Had he done so, the play should have been a comedy with the travelling salesman promising Alma's final salvation. In an earlier work, a story called "The Yellow Bird" from which the play derives, Williams does say, "She prospered in her new state... Alma's life was a triumph."

He allows Alma no such victory in the play, but the implication is that her "new state" is a descent, that her previous values were more laudable, that the spirit is doubtless higher than the flesh. At the same time, by depicting a defeat of the spirit, he brings out the tragic contradiction in society at large.

Summer and Smoke marks the final summation of the tragic element of a problem, left unresolved in the earlier works, and moves toward a final resolution in The Rose Tattoo. The representatives of Blanche's and Stanley's worlds of body and soul are not fated to remain symbols of one particular way of life. The elimination of a Stella figure, who is to choose between the two forces, allows Williams to use both worlds as capable of conversion to their opposites. In Alma he shows a potential Blanche becoming a member of Stanley's universe before the curtain comes down; in John Buchanan we see, however ineffectively, a Stanley become aware of the values of his adversary. This view of character as moving from one extreme to its opposite opens the way for a dramatic solution of the problem in which a single person becomes the focal point for both sets of values. Thus the motif of Stella's choice becomes dramatically adaptable to the Blanche-Stanley polarity.

A neat clinical piece, Summer and Smoke fails to be engaging theatre because of the overload of thematic exposition and dramatic devices. On the other hand, it represents, perhaps, Williams' only return to the lightness of touch that characterised The Glass Menagerie but is missing from most of his subsequent work.

SPRING, 1950: a tired Tennessee Williams, bored alike by the monotony of the American scene and his own fame, set out on a quest for the expatriate American writer's paranassus on the European Continent. The volatile spirits of Paris, of which Hemmingway, Stein, Fitzgerald and others had drunk heartily, seemed to have evaporated. There was too much rain in England so that the English were either in their homes or out of their country. So Williams found his haven, like Goethe, even Ibsen, under the Mediterranean skies.

Rome [he wrote in The New York Times] cannot be all things to all people, but to me it is the place where I find the sun not only in the sky ... but in the heart of the people... Truman Capote has unfurled his Bronzini scarf above the fashionable resort of Taormina [in Sicily]. He is supposedly in D.H. Lawrence's old house. And there is....André Gide...³⁹

Italy rejuvenated the staling Williams, and he returned to America with two major typescripts, a novel, The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone, and a play called The Rose Tattoo. The latter, he confessed, had been directly inspired by "the vitality, humanity, and love of life expressed by the Italian people."⁴⁰

39 "A Writer's Quest for Paranassus", New York Times Magazine, August 13, 1950, pp. 16 +

40 Tennessee Williams (to "a reporter"), quoted by John Mason Brown, "Seeing Things", Saturday Review, March 10, 1951, pp. 22-23

Thus, although the geographical setting of The Rose Tattoo (1951)⁴¹ is a little village on the outskirts of New Orleans, its inhabitants are the warm-blooded Sicilians who constitute a stronghold of some of the old-world values that caught Williams renewed attention during his Roman holiday. The central figure is a youngish Sicilian mother, Serafina Delle Rose — a part Williams wrote with his "favourite" actress, Anna Magnani, in mind. Serafina's handsome, full-bodied husband, Rosario Delle Rose — a "baron" by birth, a truck-driver by vocation, who has a rose talisman tattooed on his chest — is killed smuggling narcotics under an ostensible freight of bananas. The young widow so treasures the memory of their "glory" together that she renounces all other men — and central to her renunciation is her belief that her husband has shared the glory only with her. As a symbol of her felicity with him she recalls that the rose tattoo on his breast was momentarily reproduced on hers when (she knew!) she conceived his child — the child being lost at the time of the husband's fatal accident. With the dead man's ashes enshrined in an urn beside an image of the Virgin, Serafina closets herself, for all practical purposes even from her teen-age daughter, Rosa, whom she refuses permission to marry a young sailor she is in love with. It is three years before the whispers of local gossip about her husband's character touch her ears, when she begins to suspect whether he was faithful to her after all, and eventu-

41 The text used is the one in the collected British edition, i.e. in Five Plays by Tennessee Williams, London: Secker, 1962

ally she discovers that another woman not only shared the man with her, but even bears his rose tattoo in her bosom. This, together with the arrival on the scene of another rose tattooed banana truck driver, brings her intense mourning to an end, and restores her to normal life.

Unlike Williams' earlier heroines, Serafina is right at the moral centre of the drama. The play is concerned basically with her conflict, her choice between the values of Blanche and Alma, and of Stanley and John. Everything else, including the sub-plot of the young daughter's romance, is subordinate to it. However, some hasty generalisations have been made regarding the nature of her choice. These are largely due to the common Anglo-Saxon presumption that the Latin temperament is all for glutting the senses and starving the soul. Alma voices this myth when she tells John, "Those Latins all dream in the sun - and indulge the senses" [4P, p.197]. Williams' enthusiastic comments on the Italians' love of life, put together with his earlier Lawrence-derived connotation of "life", might have encouraged the critics to apply the myth entirely to The Rose Tattoo. The actual delineation of Serafina's character, too, is, no doubt, based on it. But - only to a point. And Clurman is right when he says that Serafina is a "rich and lyrical portrait of an Italian peasant, but she is also an embodiment of a credo," but he is not quite right in his categorical assessment that the "credo" is "the affirmation of sex as the root of a complete existence."⁴² There is no denying her

42 Harold Clurman, "Tennessee Williams' Rose", New Republic, CXXIV (February 19, 1951), 22

warm-hearted presence in the physical present during her marriage with Rosario. Early in the play, she is, indeed, the "Baronessa" of Stanley's world of carnality. In the opening scene, she begs Assunta to stay with her because her husband has not returned home and she has never spent a night alone:

I can't swallow my heart! - Not till I hear the truck stop in front of the house and his key in the lock of the door! - When I call him, and him shouting back, "Si, sono qui!" In his hair, Assunta, he has - oil of roses. And when I wake up at night - the air, the dark room's - full of - roses... Each time is the first time with him. Time doesn't pass...

[Five Plays, p. 138]

Again, after his death, she recalls this perpetual honeymoon with him:

We had love together every night of the week, we never skipped one, from the night we was married till the night he was killed... I count up the nights I held him all night in my arms. Each night for twelve years. Four thousand - three hundred - and eighty.

[5P, pp. 155-56]

Thus, after her husband's death her life seems finished, too. Father

De Leo remarks:

You are still a young woman [she married at 14, the husband died after twelve years]. Eligible for - loving - and - bearing again! I remember you dressed in pale blue silk at Mass one Easter morning, yes, like a lady wearing a - piece of the - weather! Oh, how proudly you walked, too proudly! But now you crouch and shuffle about barefooted; you live like a convict...

[5P, p. 172]

But this is not what she feels, for she has turned to a life like Amanda's or Blanche's, and lives in the beauty and nobility of the past: in comparison with the hectic mediocrity of the American bourgeoisie, she finds her dream world almost blissful.

...them women...They make life without glory. Instead of the heart they got the deep-freeze in the house. The men, they feel no glory, not in the house with them women; they go to the bars, fight in them, get drunk, get fat, put horns on the women because the women don't give them the love which is glory. - I did, I give him glory. To me the big bed was beautiful like a religion. Now I lie on it with dreams, with memories... But it is still beautiful to me ... [5P, p. 173]

She chooses to cut herself off from the world and look upon the world which Rosario left as something cheap and impure.

You give to my daughter a set of books call the Digest of Knowledge! What does she know? How to be cheap already? - Oh, yes, that is what to learn, how to be cheap and to cheat! - You know what they do at this high school? They ruin the girls there! They give the spring dance because the girls are man-crazy. And there at the dance my daughter goes with a sailor that has in his ear a gold ring... [Ibid.]

She refuses to allow Rosa to meet boys for fear that she may dishonour the sacred memory of her father. For, indeed, the memory is sacred to her - more than the laws of her Church: against the priest's wishes, she venerates Rosario's ashes, and in order to have confirmation that her faith in the dead man's fidelity is well-founded, she almost "attacks" the Father insisting that he reveal Rosario's confessional secrets:

FATHER DE LEO: Let go of me, Serafina!

SERAFINA: Not till you tell me, Father. Father, you tell me, please tell me! Or I will go mad! (In a fierce whisper.) I will go back in the house and smash the urn with the ashes - if you don't tell me! I will go mad with the doubt in my heart and I will smash the urn and scatter the ashes - of my husband's body!..... Si, si, animale! Animale. Tell them all, shout it all to them... The widow Delle Rose ...is an animal! She is attacking the priest! She will tear the black suit off him unless he tells her the whores in this town are lying to her!

[5P, p. 174]

Although not entirely in the way the priest would like, she is deeply religious. Somewhat unreasonable, she is deeply devoted to her daughter. Deluded for a long time about her husband, and broken by her grief, she guards her ideal image of him with superhuman power. Three years after being widowed, this apparent daughter of the earth is as firmly idealistic as any of the defenders of the past in the preceding plays.

However, since she has known both sets of contrasting values, she can, from her former knowledge of them, mould a way of life for the future. Thus, this movement of Serafina's allegiance forms the dramatic structure of the play, and the final choice provides the solution to the problem stated by the earlier plays. Having lived happily in Stanley's world, her stay in the domain of belle rêve cannot be permanent. The flesh renews its claim and she is too honest not to acknowledge it. She is guided by her instinct rather than reason: the new truck-driver strikes her as "my husband's body, with the head of a clown" [5P, p. 180], and, indeed, he soon reveals that his grandfather was a village idiot. But the three years of dedication to the soul, to the exclusion of the flesh, have, as it were, widened the scope even of her instincts. For her action is the result of genuine human sympathy:

ALVARO: You are simpatica, molto!— It was not just the fight that makes me break down. I was like this all today! (He shakes his clenched fist in the air.)

SERAFINA: You and - me, too! - What was the trouble today?

ALVARO: My name is Mangicavallo, which means "Eat-a-horse".

It's a comical name, I know. Maybe two thousand and seventy years ago one of my grandfathers got so hungry that he ate up a horse! That ain't my fault. Well, today at the Southern Fruit Company I find on the pay envelope not "Mangiacavallo"

but "EAT A HORSE" in big print!...I open the pay envelope!
 In it I find a notice. - The wages have been garnishee!
 You know what garnishee is? (Serafina nods gravely.)
 Garnishee! - Eat a horse! - Road hog! - All in one day
 is too much! I go crazy, I boil, I cry, and I am ashamed
 but I am not able to help it! - Even a wop truck driver's
 a human being! And human beings must cry... [5P, pp 180-81]

This apparently comic figure does not strike Serafina as such, for she
 replies: "Yes, they must cry." It is his desperate loneliness and honesty,
 rather than the rose tattoo that he rushes out and has inscribed across
 his chest, that bemuse and finally overpower her. Her religion of love
 is, as it were, sublimated by her three years of contemplation.

...The important thing in a lady is understanding. Good
 sense. And I want her to have a well-furnished house and
 a profitable little business of some kind... [He has
 previously mentioned three heartless dependents - an
 old maid sister with some female trouble mostly of the
 brain, a feeble-minded grandmother, and a pop who is not
 worth the powder it would take to blow him up...all three
 illegal immigrants]

SERAFINA: And such a lady, with a well-furnished house and
 business, what does she want with a man with three depend-
 ents with the parchesi and the beer habit, playing the
 numbers!

ALVARO: Love and affection! - in a world that is lonely - and
 cold!

SERAFINA: It might be lonely but I would not say "cold" on this
 particular day!

ALVARO: Love and affection is what I got to offer on hot or
 cold days in this lonely world and is what I am looking for.
 I got nothing else. Mangiacavallo has nothing. In fact he
 is the grandson of the village idiot of Ribera!

SERAFINA (uneasily): I see you like to make - jokes!

ALVARO: No, no joke! - Davvero! - He chased my grandmother in a
 flooded rice field. She slip on a wet rock. - Ecco! Here I am.

SERAFINA: You ought to be more respectful.

ALVARO: What have I got to respect? The rock my grandmother
 slipped on?

SERAFINA: Yourself at least!...

Without the slightest cold calculation on her part, the material soundness of the match is ensured as well. For this man is surely incapable of double-dating. He is even incapable of smuggling dope - has never thought of it [p. 183]. It is, as if Serafina's spiritual quest had turned her "instincts" from an animal function into a poetic function. For, as Shelley said in Defence of Poetry, the poet's "reasons may be wrong, but his instincts are right," and Serafina's instincts prove both ethically and practically right.

However, her honesty holds her from making a headlong plunge at the sight of the first eligible lover. "The memory of love," she says, "don't make you unhappy unless you believe a lie that makes it dirty. I don't believe in the lie. The ashes are clean [Earlier: "The bodies decay but ashes always stay clean - immacolate"]]. The memory of the rose in my heart is perfect!...." [5P, pp. 184-85]. But it is honesty, too, that sets her to find out the truth about her husband and Estelle Hohengarten. When she verifies Rosario's infidelity she is honest enough to act in accordance with her discovery. The truth is strong enough in her to force her to re-evaluate the past which she has worshipped and to destroy the urn of ashes, send her daughter off with the sailor, and take Alvaro as a lover. The urn she shatters is not of her spirituality, which is to stay with her and ensure her happiness, but only the delusion on which spirituality was wasted. Serafina's adaptability to truth is her salvation, for it gives her a flexibility which delivers her from immolation to an ideal. Her return to the world is not tragic like Stella's,

Laura's and Alma's return to reality. For Serafina is not a slave to the new life; she is to be the master. Thus her religion of love as the redeeming force in the world is a composite of idealism and realism; it contains the spiritual quality of the abstract word LOVE and yet is firmly rooted in the flesh. In a dynamic way Serafina has accomplished a synthesis of Belle Reve and Elysian Fields. She has joined the heroic devotion which Blanche has for the past with the vital strength which Stanley has in the present. She is Williams' solution to what appears to be an either-or choice in the earlier plays. She is able to solve the dilemma of the modern man by reconciling both alternatives with little difficulty. She can live in the flesh with Rosario or in the spirit with his memory or in both when truth leads her to the religion of love. She is the rejuvenated Laura and the thoroughly adaptable Stella. She has experienced love and despair and thus has been freed from the necessity of a tragic end. She is to Williams the one hope of the world because of her great vitality and her capacity to love. She is the solution of the modern human problem through her ability to establish an equilibrium between the two temptations arising from man's dual nature. Williams called The Rose Tattoo a folk comedy, though it opens with the death of the man the heroine loved most; then follows the long interlude of her isolation from life; then the sad discovery. Had he not implied a final triumph of the human spirit in Serafina's marriage to the grandson of a village idiot, he would have called it a melodrama.

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF (1955),⁴³ perhaps the most controversial of Williams' works, is a sermon on the triumph of truth over deception, of love over loneliness. In its concern with the subject of appearance and reality, illusion and disillusion, it recalls The Iceman Cometh, but - due largely to the mode of treatment - unlike the O'Neill play, or even Williams' own work last discussed above, the moral point of view here is negative rather than positive. The action of the play takes place in a bed-sitting room and along the gallery of a plantation home in the Mississippi Delta, on the estate of an aging, uneducated, often coarse field hand who became overseer of a cotton plantation and inherited it, turned it into "28,000 acres of the richest land this side of the Valley Nile," and became a multimillionaire. This huge patriarch called Pollitt is addressed as "Big Daddy" by his family which consists of his ignorant, garrulous wife, "Big Mama"; their elder son, Gooper, his ever-pregnant wife, Mae, and their five children; and a younger son, Brick, and his wife Maggie - the "cat" of the title. The bullying, virile old man is dying of cancer, but Gooper and Mae conceal the medical report from him, and are instead celebrating his sixty-fifth birthday in the hope of cashing it up with the inheritance. The youngest couple are getting along very badly: Brick, an ex-athlete and TV sports announcer has broken his ankle in a drunken feat of athletics, and is

43 The text used is as published in the London ed. (Five Plays) which includes both the "original" and the "Broadway" version as revised by the author at the instance of the New York producer, Elia Kazan.

fast becoming an alcoholic - sullen, withdrawn, dissociated from his wife, disinterested in the family squabble. While lawyer-brother Gooper and his vindictive wife scheme together to gain control of the estate, Maggie clings tenaciously to the hot tin roof of a marriage on the rocks and Brick's rightful share in the inheritance which will mean security, something she has never known in life.

The climax of the play comes when, after the birthday ritual, Big Daddy confronts Brick with the reason behind his professional and marital failure. Brick tries to avoid a showdown with his father, but the latter forces the issue by hinting at something Maggie has suspected - that Brick may have had homosexual relations with his best friend and former team-mate, Skipper, who died of alcohol and drugs. Deeply hurt, Brick gives Big Daddy his equally unpleasant version of the truth, and tells his father the truth about the latter's own physical condition in the bargain. The struggle for property becomes more desperate between Gooper and Mae, on the one hand, and Maggie, on the other. Big Daddy is basically favourable to the younger couple, and when Maggie tells him (the lie) that she is pregnant, he is more than ready to sign off the land to the forthcoming grandchild. Mae derides Maggie's claim, Gooper decides to bide his time hoping that Maggie's promise will not be fulfilled. But there is a dubiously hopeful hint at the end that Maggie's lie is intended to regain her husband as well as the property, for she hurls the liquor bottles into the river and invites him to make good her pledge of offspring: Brick will conquer his condition!?

Before considering any positive values that the play might have to offer, it is worth looking at the "immoral" aspect of it. For Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Williams' greatest commercial success to date, his third play to win the New York Drama Critics Award, and his second to receive the Pulitzer Prize, has been, even more than Streetcar, a subject of public condemnation. The Time critic found it "a harsh and bitter play" because of its revelation of "sex, illness, greed, dislike."⁴⁴ Life, usually soft-spoken about the playwright's work, characterised it as "bristling with brutal language, violent action..."⁴⁵ Euphemia Wyatt wrote in The Catholic World: "Although it has been clear for some time that the days of good breeding have gone by in our theatre, what this [Pollitt] family can think and say about each other passes all belief."⁴⁶ Robert Hatch made what he righteously termed his "old-fashioned complaint" in these words: "I wish his plays weren't so disagreeable. I left it feeling that I had spent an evening with a group of corpses that had very little to recommend them when they were alive. ...I doubt that even on a Mississippi Delta plantation people behave so when they are awake."⁴⁷ Maurice Zolotow visualised Tennessee Williams as one of his own unintellectual brutes: "If Kowalski were a playwright, this is the kind of play he would write...scenes of violence for the sake violence, obscenity for the sake of obscenity."⁴⁸ "The play," said Marya

44 "New Play in Manhattan", Time, LXV (April 4, 1955)

45 "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof", Life, XXXVII (April 8, 1955), 137

46 "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof", Catholic World, CLXXXI (May, 1955), 147

48 "The Season On and Off Broadway", Theatre Arts, XXXIX (June 55), 22

47 "Theater", Nation, CLXXX (April 9, 1955), 314

Mannes in an article written in a Brutus-is-an-honourable-man vein of admiration, "is a compelling study of violence: the violence of an obscene, gargantuan, perceptive man, Big Daddy, against his body's end, against his own frustration, against the trap of his family; the violence of the alcoholic Brick against the woman and wife who 'destroyed' his pure and noble relationship with another youth by suspecting its nature; the violence of the rejected Maggie in her attempts to recapture her husband's physical attentions..."⁴⁹ A host of critics went on — fondling by the trunk, as it were, the elephant of Big Daddy's "dirty" story in the third act (which Williams unhesitatingly expurgated during the Broadway run). Many more objected to the four-letter vocabulary, as a matter of principle. British censors, grown wise since their fatal error with Streetcar "killed" the Cat — as the Persian proverb goes — only to find that Peter Hall, knowing there were eight more lives in the beast, let it out of the English-proverbial bag by mounting a "private" performance for a theatre "club" which enrolled more members on an evening than the R.S.P.C.A. in a year. (Ironical that a five-shilling subscription should empower the meanest Cat-lover to out-Chamberlain the omnipotent censors! But perhaps not so ironical as the situation in at least one other country where stage performance of the play was forbidden, the printed text crept up to the shelves of secondary school libraries, while the Paul Newman — Elizabeth

49 "The Morbid Magic of Tennessee Williams" Reporter, May 1955, p.41

Taylor-Burl Ives film was considered harmless enough to the morals of those who had survived eighteen years of life as it is.) The Théâtre Antoine production faced the most violent condemnation that a Williams play has ever encountered in Paris. But obscenity, sex, and uninhibited talk of sex were not the only weapons critics used against Cat: at least two major drama critics — Walter Kerr⁵⁰ and Eric Bentley⁵¹ — found the play lacking in moral earnestness because it did not confront the question of homosexuality squarely enough.

Williams himself has done more theorising regarding this play than any other. To him, Cat is basically concerned with human relations. In an unusual "stage direction" in the middle of Act II, he says:

The bird I hope to catch in the net of this play is not the solution to one man's psychological problem. I'm trying to catch the true quality of experience in a group of people, the cloudy, flickering, evanescent — fiercely charged! — interplay of live human beings in the thunder-cloud of a common crisis.

[5P, p. 61]

Within this complex of relationships, the father-son axis seems to be intended as central. This is made clear by the Dylan Thomas quotation that precedes the published text:

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light!

[5P, p. vii]

50 "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof", New York Herald Tribune, March 25, 1955.

51 "Theatre", New Republic, CXXXII (April 11, 1955), 28

That the "godlike" Brick should thus venerate so coarse a father must appear incongruous, for here is what he says of his mother:

... I slept with Big Mama till, let's see, five years ago, till I was sixty and she was fifty eight, and never even liked her, never did! ... All I ask of that woman is that she leave me alone. But she can't admit to herself that she makes me sick. That comes of having slept with her too many years. Should of quit much sooner but that old woman never got enough of it - and I was good in bed...

[5P, p. 49]

To the author, however, an emotional bond between Brick and Big Daddy is perfectly compatible with the character of each. Williams once remarked, "I thought Big Daddy had a certain stature and bigness, almost a nobility, in his crude way."⁵² Actually the play does not really contradict this. This character can be accepted at various levels. Perhaps, first of all, as a "big" low-comedy figure, one of Shakespeare's drunken rogues, or perhaps one of the seafaring rogues of Burl Ives' sailing and whaling songs, or a cockney soldier, in which light his violent obscenity seems acceptable in a good-humoured way. Then as a sympathetic figure, as the arch-sufferer in the unfortunate clan. For, in a literal sense, he is the decaying leaf, or rather the trunk, under the locust of his cancer. Notice, for instance, how, wracked with pain soon after expressing his disgust for his wife, he clings to her as if he could not trust any one more. Weaknesses do make human beings acceptable as much as virtues, and perhaps one might think before discarding Big Daddy. Brick certainly does.

52 Don Ross, (an interview), New York Herald Tribune, March 3, 1957, p2

However, the deeper significance of Big Daddy derives from his position as an embodiment of both the tragedy and the triumph that preoccupies the playwright. In his Preface to the play - "Person to Person" [first published as a prologue, in New York Times to the Broadway production, reprinted in Five Plays, pp. ix-xii] - Williams states his profound belief in the intense and fundamental need of each human being to communicate with his fellows; or (to borrow another Williams expression) a person's longing to "wear his heart on his sleeve." It presupposes an "audience" - whether or not the person is a playwright - to share his inmost thoughts, feelings and beliefs. A family group should provide the most natural audience to fulfil this need, and although communication does not mean words, words, words - clean or obscene - Big Daddy's extreme candor and volubility in the midst of this group may possibly be regarded as a linguistic device, a physical manifestation of this "Look at me, look at me, look at me!" [5P, p. ix] urge. He shares it with all human beings, and he shares the frustration of this primary need with his family, particularly with Brick and Maggie. The locust, then, is not so much his cancer - which is probably another symbolic equivalent, for the deeper malady - but the moral choice that results in each case in the condition of isolation when communication becomes impossible, that state of "solitary confinement inside our own skins" [Ibid.] Williams' obsession in the play is not with the sensational façade, with "sex for the sake of sex" and "obscenity for the sake of obscenity", but with an exploration of the

wrong choices that can break down communication, understanding, love within a naturally homogenous group. In the revelation of these - both to himself and to others on each side of the proscenium - Big Daddy rises above Brick and Maggie and justly deserves their admiration for it. He is the first to recognise the phony nature of his pipe dream. One can, if one chooses, read this in a social context, and blame at least part of his moral failure to the circumstances of his underprivileged origin, but he craves no such mercy, and openly renounces the god he has worshipped so long;

... It's lucky I'm a rich man, it sure is lucky, well, I'm a rich man, Brick, yep, I'm a mighty rich man.
 (His eyes light up for a moment.)
 Y'know how much I'm worth? Guess, Brick! Guess how much I'm worth!
 (Brick smiles vaguely over his drink.)
 Close on ten million in cash an' blue chip stocks, outside, mind you, of twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile!
 (A puff and crackle and the night sky blooms with an eerie greenish glow. Children shriek in the gallery.)
 But a man can't buy his life with it, he can't buy back his life with it when his life has been spent, that's one thing not offered in the Europe fire-sale or in the American markets or any markets on earth, a man can't buy his life with it, he can't buy back his life when his life is finished.. That's a sobering thought, a very sobering thought, and that's a thought that I was turning over in my head, over and over and over - until today...
 I'm wiser and sadder, Brick, for this experience which I just gone through.

[5P, pp. 44-45]

Maggie, who shares several of Big Daddy's attributes - his frank sensuality, his high-strung and vital nature - shares, too, his original deluded faith in the power of money:

Always had to suck up to people I couldn't stand because they had money and I was poor as Job's turkey. You don't know what that's like. Well, I'll tell you, it's like you'd feel a thousand miles away from Echo Spring! And had to get back to it on that broken ankle...without a crutch!

That's how it feels to be as poor as Job's turkey and to have to suck up to relatives you hated because they had money and all you had was a bunch of hand-me-down clothes and a few old moldy three per cent government bonds. My daddy loved his liquor, he fell in love with his liquor the way you've fallen in love with Echo Spring! — And my poor Mama, having to maintain some semblance of social position, to keep appearances up, on an income of one hundred and fifty dollars a month on those old government bonds!

When I came out, the year that I made my debut, I had just two evening dresses! One Mother made me from a pattern in Vogue, the other a hand-me-down from a snotty rich cousin I hated!

— The dress that I married you in was my grandmother's weddin' gown...

So that's why I'm like a cat on a hot tin roof!

[5P, p.24]

She is not to blame for not having reached Big Daddy's perception of her delusion, but nonetheless her stature remains lower by comparison with him. It is, unfortunate that she is not allowed an opportunity to watch Big Daddy's disillusionment (as Brick is), which is perhaps why she is prepared until the end to work aggressively, with her characteristic candor to keep herself and her husband from the wolf by lying about her pregnancy and thus securing a goodly portion of the estate. The absence of such contact as might have dispelled her faith in the deluding god, however, lends further prominence to the relationship between Big Daddy and Brick.

"Admiration" was the word used above, but perhaps it might be

qualified at this stage to point to the exact nature of the father-son relationship. "Awe" or "affection" or "understanding" might be a more accurate term, and then too it would be only a partial description. Brick feels one or all of these for his father because of the latter's great bounding love of, and faith in, life - a quality Brick finds missing in himself. The awe is partial because the son knows that Big Daddy's great confidence in the face of his impending death is, after all, a piece of dramatic irony, for it has been restored by a lie. But there is a sense of kinship precisely because of that. For Brick eventually realises that he himself has been living a lie, worshipping a false god, the god of youth:

Maggie declares that Skipper and I went into pro-football after we left "Ole Miss" because we were scared to grow up...

(He moves downstage with the shuffle and clomp of a cripple on a crutch. As Margaret did when her speech became recitative, he looks out into the house, commanding its attention by his direct concentrated gaze - a broken, "tragically elegant" figure telling simply as much as he knows of "the Truth":)

- Wanted to - keep on tossing - those long, long! - high, high! - passes that - couldn't be intercepted except by time, the aerial attack that made us famous! And so we did, we did, we kept it up for one season, that aerial attack, we held it high! - Yeah, but -
- that summer, Maggie, she laid the law to me, said, Now or never, and so I married Maggie...

[5P, pp. 65-66]

The fact that it is Big Daddy who forces "the Truth" upon him finally arouses Brick's gratitude, but his emotion for Big Daddy is really deeper than gratitude. Brick finds both his own and Big Daddy's "lies" created for them, or at least forced upon them, by an unjust world

whose highest values are greed, lust for money, lust for power – exemplified in brother Gooper – a world that Arthur Miller described as "senselessly reproducing itself through ugly children conceived without the grace of genuine affection, and delivered not so much as children but as inheritors of great wealth and power, the new perpetuators of inequity."⁵⁴ So that the "lie" ceases to be personal, almost ceases to be a lie, and turns into the idealist's struggle for preservation. Too fragile to assume the heroic role himself, however, Brick visualises this heroism in his father.

In sharp contrast to this warm contact with the father is Brick's relationship with his mother. Big Mama is primarily a link between the father and the son – sometimes she is literally a messenger. She often goes about repeating Big Daddy's profound droll stories verbatim, which is the real explanation why (as several critics object) "everyone's talking about how good so-and-so is or isn't in bed". At her best, Big Mama occasionally looks like an inferior version of the admirable Miller "mothers" (which might have been the reason why Mildred Dunnock who had given a memorable performance as Linda in Death of a Salesman – on the stage and screen – was chosen to play Big Mama.) But while she shares the sentimental-wife image of Miller's "moms", she lacks their intelligence as well as their depth of emotion. One cannot really blame Big Daddy for his frustration in marriage, except perhaps in the sense that in her Big Daddy made another of his wrong choices.

54 Arthur Miller, "The Shadows of the Gods", Harper's, CCXVII (Aug 58)

It is a common complaint that the play ends at an incredibly artificial note of triumph of love: even the Broadway Version draws the curtain on Maggie saying:

Oh, you weak, beautiful people who give up with such grace. What you need is someone to take hold of you - gently, with love, and hand your life back to you like something gold you let go of - and I can! I'm determined to do it - and nothing's more determined than a cat on a hot tin roof - is there? Is there, baby?

[5P, p. 123]

For one thing, the speech does not suggest disembodied love, so it is in character. For another, there is nothing to suggest in the preceding pages that Maggie, despite her sin against Skipper or Brick, did not love her husband. But since more often it is Brick's acceptance of the situation that is questioned - has he suddenly begun to see greater depth in the love of the woman who is committed to bear him a child? or does this mark the beginning of the end of Brick's idealism? - the partial answer to which is to be found in that the heroism Brick perceives in Big Daddy *inspires* him with at least some hope that life is worth living and propagating, because given a little more love it may not seem as lonely, and because the renewal of society may in itself prove its moral regeneration as well. One must go at least part of the way with Williams when he says:

I meant for the audience to discover how people erect false values by not facing what is true in their natures, by having to live a lie, and I hoped the audience would admire the heroic persistence of life and vitality; and I hoped they would feel the thwarted desire of people to reach each other through this fog, this screen of incomprehension. What I want most of all

is to catch the quality of existence and experience.
I want people to think, "This is life."⁵⁵

THE second decade of Williams' professional career is marked by several departures - some quite grotesque - from the relatively direct and affirmative treatment of man and universe in his earlier plays. The image of man that emerges is one of the stranger, estranged largely by his own transgression and on the run as a result - the "fugitive kind". The outsider, it must be recognised, is a fact of human society, not excluding American society. Anyone who has lived in the English Midlands does not have to stretch his imagination too far to realise that the "immigrant" in a provincial society - such as Williams' small town South must be - never really gets absorbed into the community. The foreigner, even when he ceases to be a foreigner, remains an outsider. The "melting pot" always leaves behind large heterogeneous lumps of alienation. The fact is reinforced, in Williams' society, by the legend. One example was mentioned in the discussion of The Rose Tattoo above: namely the myth about the Mediterranean temperament. The Southern negro is another that comes to mind. There, then, was ready-made material for Williams' theme of the outsider, and although it receives intensive explication in his more recent work, the theme is implicit in his early plays: the negro Loon in Battle of Angels (1945), the ironically all-American Jim

⁵⁵ Tennessee Williams in the Don Ross interview, op. cit.

O'Connor in The Glass Menagerie, Papa and Rosa Gonzales, the fiery Mexicans, in Summer and Smoke, are explicit images of the outsider. More subtle ones are Tom, and, in some ways, Blanche, the "poets". These are outsiders, not in the conventional socio-historical sense, but because of their excessive sensitivity which renders them incapable of strong identification with the dominant group and its conventions, an identification which "protects" the "insiders". In the early works, however, their treatment is, by and large, social: in more recent plays there is a marked shift in emphasis, and perhaps the transition occurs in Orpheus Descending (1958).

This play is a "revised" version of the very early Battle of Angels, Williams' first attempt to reach Broadway. Battle of Angels, according to Williams "a lyrical play about memories and the loneliness of them", is in fact a more complex structure than that, and the range of characters it offers may, in charitable hands, bear some comparison with the various levels of culture of the Yoknapatawpha County. [Some critics have suggested Faulkner among Williams' literary ancestors, although he himself has never explicitly stated this influence - while he often acknowledges Hart Crane as one.] Had it not been for the technical failure of a backstage smoke-machine during the Boston tryout, Battle of Angels might have been a somewhat honourable predecessor to The Glass Menagerie on Broadway. However, it is obvious that Williams was not satisfied with the work as it was, nor was he able to resist the fascination that its material held out to him. The revised play, Orpheus, is enlivened on the

surface by a piquant humour, some youthful "poetry", and a degree of romantic bohemianism (probably the result of the bohemian circumstances⁵⁶ under which the revision was carried out), but beneath all this there is deep unromantic agony.

The "Orpheus" of the play is the handsome, snakeskin-jacketed young Val Xavier, who plays the guitar rather than the lyre, and gets stranded in, rather than make a journey to, the hades of a Two River County small town which is itself stranded. His capacity for charming the beasts is open to a good deal of doubt in view of his untidy end at the hands of the bigotted beasts of this town, but he is certainly one for rousing passions for presently two of the females are breathing considerably harder. The young Carol Cutrere, a belle in rebellion, gets a mute spiritual-brotherly corrective kind of affection from him (just as the sheriff's old wife, Vee Talbot, who paints visions, gets a son's sustenance); but the one who has "better luck" - in the short run, that is - is the middle aged Lady Torrance (Lady is her Christian name), proprietress of the local drugstore, married to an old dying cancerite who was among the vicious townspeople who set fire to her Italian father's grape-arbor and burnt him to death. Lady offers Val first a job in the store, then a place to sleep in, and finally herself to sleep with. She has always regarded herself as barren, but she is now with child by Val. But just when the "dead" Euridice is restored

56 See "The Past, The Present, and The Perhaps" (Preface to Orpheus Descending), in Five Plays, pp. 287-90

to love and life, and is preparing to open a new "confectionery" which will restore to Two River County the Italian beauty of her father's erotic arbor, Jabe sizes up the situation, as husbands will, lurches down the stairs one night, and puts a bullet through Lady's vital belly, while the sheriff and his deputies destroy the Orpheus.

At the level of fairly obvious pagan myth, the play parallels the archetypal details: Lady, Carol and Vee represent the revelling maenads who envy Val's unfamiliar and magical music and bring about his destruction. The brief career of Val reveals the savagery that still clings to civilised man. For in his murder each of the maenads has a complicity. His exploitation by Lady through her almost indecently rapid seduction, and related to this her hatred for her husband (she declares she wishes he were dead), the husband's cruelty toward her father, and their mutual attitude of revenge. Carol's occasional advances on him are unaccompanied by any positive moral sustenance, and although she is his kind, she does not represent his aspiration - which is to cling to his "guitar", the symbol of purity, including sexual purity since the guitar is a phallic symbol as well; Carol's efforts, if they were to succeed, would only defile the guitar. Even his relationship with the religious, visionary Vee Talbot proves to be a Clytemnestra-Orestes situation in reverse, for it is from the Talbot house that his death sentence issues. Perhaps even more dominant than these individual forces of destruction is the violence expressed by the collective will of the "community" (if such it may be designated), represented in the

lynching law violence, and vividly and grotesquely manifested in Jabe's murder of the play's Euridice - a fertility ritual almost, a dance of death in life:

LADY: ...Unpack the box! Unpack the box with the Christmas ornaments in it, put them on me, glass bells and glass birds and stars and tinsel and snow! (In a sort of delirium she thrusts a conical gilt paper hat on her head and runs to the foot of the stairs with the paper horn. She blows the horn over and over, grotesquely mounting the stairs, as Val tries to stop her. She breaks away from him and runs up to the landing, blowing the paper horn and crying out:) I've won, I've won, Mr. Death, I'm going to bear! (Then suddenly she falters, catches her breath in a short gasp and awkwardly retreats to the stairs. Then turns screaming and runs back down them, her cries dying out as she arrives at the floor level. She retreats haltingly as a blind person, a hand stretched out to Val, as slow, clumping footsteps and hoarse breathing are heard on the stairs. She moans:) - Oh, God! oh - God! ...

[5P, pp. 371-72]

But taken purely at this level, the play, despite its implied social comment, falls to pieces. No wonder one critic remarked:

Mr. Williams' Orphic hero, having rejected any traffic in personal or social commitment, cannot enter into experience... Since his destiny never assumes the rhythm of inevitability, the handing of him over to death - a literal throwing to the bloodhounds - seems a wanton stroke by the playwright...⁵⁷

The playwright has, however, already advanced his reasons for this "wanton stroke" in the Preface. Williams writes:

On its surface it was and still is the tale of a wild-spirited boy who wanders into a conventional community of the South and creates the commotion of a fox in a chicken coop.

57 Richard Hayes, "The Tragic Pretension", Commonweal, April 26, 1957, p95

But beneath the now familiar surface it is a play about unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people and the difference between continuing to ask them, a difference represented by the four major protagonists of the play, and the acceptance of prescribed answers that are not answers at all, but expedient adaptations or surrender to a state of quandry.

[5P, p. 288]

As Williams points out, the four characters, at a deeper level, share a strong bond of kinship. Val's commitment is a Hamletian pursuit to know. He does not "act" in the conventional sense, but is rather acted upon, malignantly operated upon. But action need not necessarily be in extent; it may as well be in depth. There is a good deal of - negative - action in extent in his past. His present action, the positive, consists in discovering the answers that "action" has failed to reveal, and he seeks this discovery through the various roles he assumes - lover, brother, son, and eventually the saviour symbolised in his name. The commitment is to this discovery and if it involves an unheroic (or, as Miss Jackson⁵⁸ more accurately terms it, "antiheroic") descent into the underworld of Two River County, he is prepared to pay the knowledge by which not only he but the others too must finally stand to gain. Lady, like Val, is an outsider herself. Not only is she, unlike her counterpart - Myrah - in Battle of Angels, given an Italian ancestry⁵⁹ but she has had to live all her life in enemy territory. She has lived in a house of hate and slept between murderous sheets stained with

58 Esther Merle Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, *passim*.

59 Many critics believe that Lady was created darker than Myrah so that Magnani's face fit the mask, but I think Williams had a more aesthetic reason for doing so - to symbolise the character's estrangement.

her parental blood and cursed with sterility. Carol is a fugitive in the literal as well as allegorical sense. She is always on the run - in that unlicensed car of hers, running in search - of a one-night affair every night, a shelter. She has turned a "lewd vagrant" (as she describes herself) since her disillusionment after her failure to save a negro from lynching. Truth is dearer to her, however unpleasant, than her blood, her brother. She is much more content to have contact with Val through the snakeskin jacket he leaves behind than with the hollow respectability that her brother wants to offer her. Vee, likewise, is being constantly being pursued by her husband, the law-enforcing authority in the community, as if she were a criminal. She is a born outsider:

VAL: Have you always had visions?

VEE: No, just since I was born⁶⁰, I - ... I was born, I was born with a caul! A sort of thing like a veil, a thin, thin sort of web over my eyes. They call that a caul. It's a sign that you're going to have visions, and I did, I had them...

[5P, p. 337]

An ironic social comment is implicit in the fact that, according to society, vision is precisely what she lacks. Society seems to get a kind of elation and vicarious delight from considering itself at a more advanced stage of civilisation just because she does not see the world exactly as it does, because she can transcend what it regards as vision. "They call me a visionary," she says, "That's what the New Orleans and

60 Her implied faith in a pre-terrestrial existence foreshadows the crucifixion to come by suggesting here the original sin.

Memphis newspaper people admire in my work. They call it a primitive style, the work of a visionary." [Ibid.]

However, none of the four fugitives is willing to accept a ready-made answer to the mystery of his or her cursed existence, and they each pursue their individual quest. The ultimate discovery, in each case, is to be of personal complicity in their destruction, but the volcanic societal violence conspires with it. Sheriff Talbot speaks for all the insiders when he warns Val:

But I'm gonna tell you something. They's a certain county I know of which has a big sign at the county line that says, "Nigger, don't let the sun go down on you in this county." That's all it says, it don't threaten nothing, it just says, "Nigger, don't let the sun go down on you in this county!" (Chuckles hoarsely. Rises and takes a step toward Val.)

Well, son! You ain't a nigger and this is not that county, but, son, I want you to just imagine that you seen a sign that said to you: "Boy, don't let the sun rise on you in this county." I said, "rise" not "go down" because it's too close to sunset for you to git packed an' move before that, but if you value that instrument.....

[5P, pp. 359-60]

Society is, as it were, brimful of evil, and must at once have a victim to be offered as a sacrifice to atone for it. The frenzy of the Bacchanites is, thus, telescoped in the fever of crucifixion which gripped Jesus' Jerusalem. If Lady's death affirms the parallel with the pagan myth, Val's incineration underlines in pagan terms Williams' use of Christian mythology. The time is Easter. [5P, p. 349]. The scene is a pathetic reconstruction of the crucifixion.

VOICES OF MEN (shouting): Keep to the walls! He's armed!
—Upstairs, Dog!

—Jack, the confectionery!
 (Wild cry back of store.)
 —Got him. GOT HIM!
 —They got him!
 —Rope, git rope!
 —I got something better than rope!
 —What've you got?
 —What's that, what's he got?
 —A B L O W T O R C H!
 —Christ....

[5P, p.373]

The irony is that the first forebodings of this impending event comes from the one who, in the eyes of the world, is a lunatic and a heretic. The picture that Vee shows is of the Church of Ressurrection, and she insists that Val affiliate with the Church: "I want you to go to ours ... The Church of Ressurrection. It's ours." [5P, p. 336]. 'Tis, literally, a plague of the times when the madmen lead the blind!!

A VERY grotesque variant on the theme of transgression and flight is Williams' Suddenly Last Summer, the major piece in the double bill called Garden District (1958).⁶¹ Its plot is built around a merciless conflict in which Mrs. Violet Venables, a rich, educated, intelligent, wheel-chaired, reticuled, fierce-voiced, loquacious widow of New Orleans, engages her helpless, beautiful, young niece by marriage, Catherine Holly, over the image and reputation of her dead son, Sebastian Venables. Sebastian, we are told, was a "poet" — snobbish, sterile, open to perversion — who derived his inspiration chiefly from the exquisite

61. Included in Five Plays, London: 1962

savageries of nature like the annual massacre of thousands of newly-hatched turtles by predatory birds on the beach; composed deliberately and was content with an output of one poem a year as long as he could set it up lovingly on his own eighteenth century hand press. This super-aesthete, reared in the hothouse of his mother's presence, was rescued by her during his only lapse into the peaceful aspect of divinity represented by a Buddhist monastery in the Himalayas, although, to accomplish this, she had to forsake her dying husband. Unable, because of illness, to accompany him on his last voyage, to Europe, she let him go with Catherine. According to Catherine, who returned alone, he suddenly started using the pretty cousin to procure boys, and met his end at the hands of a mob of them at a Spanish seaside resort. The wild, rapacious, starved urchins literally ate him up.

It becomes clear during the action that both women were, in their separate ways, abnormally attached to the young man, and both are convinced that he was a genius. But the conflict arises from the mother's fierce determination to protect his reputation - at any cost - against the niece's inherent inability to suppress the truth, however horrible. Catherine's state of shock has led to her confinement in a mental asylum, and taking advantage of the situation, Mrs. Venables tries to induce, and heavily bribe, a young idealist psycho-surgeon, Dr. Sugar, to perform a pre-frontal lobotomy on the girl to expunge the event from her memory. The doctor turns out not to be as corrupt as the rest of the world: he moves cautiously in his diagnosis, and soon realises that Catherine is

by no means as deranged as her aunt insists. To prove his point, the doctor puts the girl under mild sedation and lets her tell her story to the greedy family hopefully assembled to share the spoils of Sebastian's estate.

This horror story, melodrama, psychopathic fantasy - call it what you will - is not devoid of moral significance. In fact, one is tempted (as Coleridge was when asked if his horror story of The Ancient Mariner had a moral) to say that "it has too much moral." Suddenly Last Summer is more an abstraction than a play. Harold Clurman, who had directed Williams' modern morality of Orpheus, thought that Suddenly was a "product of a general concept...rather than of living experience."⁶² Brooks Atkinson of The New York Times, Williams' most constant supporter among the Big Five who decide the fate of an American play, paraphrased Sebastian and said that since "a poet's life is his work, and his work is his life," the play "is not a theatrical pose; it conveys his [Williams'] sense of reality... Believing in ...the validity of what he is saying, Mr. Williams has made art out of malignance and maleficence, like Rémy de Gourmont and Baudelaire."⁶³ The last comparison is interesting, because more than ever before, Williams seeks in this play to express his ethical credo purely through symbolist means. Characters and incidents in Suddenly Last Summer are not to be taken at their face value, for the

⁶² "Theatre", Nation, CLXXXVI (January 25, 1958), 86-87

⁶³ "Garden District," New York Times, January 19, 1958

playwright views and creates his universe, like the French Symbolists, as "un magasin d'images et de signes auxquels l'imagination donnera une place et une valeur relative..."⁶⁴ The men and events must become part of what Baudelaire called the "milieu coloré", or Whitman designated as the "soul",⁶⁵ where each "object" [or perhaps one should render "objet" as "existence"] is to find its relative place and value. Williams is not interested in the individual drama of Sebastian or Catherine, but in their exemplary rôles, and if one is disturbed, at first by the "unreality" or bizarrerie of the atmosphere of Suddenly Last Summer, one finds, in the end, that they are essential to what Atkinson calls the playwright's "sense of reality".

Despite some apparent resemblances to his previous work, however, it is a much darker universe that Williams' personages make and inhabit in Suddenly. Sebastian, on the surface, another of Williams' "artists", longing desperately to express himself - in life as well as in art - has his sense of reality, of life, death and God - not unlike the playwright's own:

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

[5P, p. 244]

64 Baudelaire, L'art Romantique

65 See poems like "Warble for Lilac-time"

If the contemporary world of violence and cruelty is a creation of God, one cannot really blame Sebastian for visualising Him in the cruellest manifestations of nature.

Sebastian is, too, another of Williams' fugitives. His urge for self-expression, however morbid, is constantly repressed by his domineering mother - an image, as it were, of the repressive forces of society ever determined to oppress the most insignificant nonconformity. (This attitude on her part needs little elaboration in view of her wilful commitment to efface Catherine's consciousness simply because it poses a threat to her cherished beliefs.) One might safely assume on evidence within the play that she suppressed her son's natural impulse for love and stood between him and Catherine in life just as she does after his death. Her indifference to his father could not have ensured anything like a domestic harmony for young Sebastian to be brought up amidst. Through her neglect of her dying husband, she herself has led the son into perversion by fostering an Oedipal attitude in him. Having known how the violent aspects of the universe had bred a lopsided loveless sterility in him, she discouraged him from complementing this vision through contact with the peaceful and compassionate aspects: it was she who, at the peril of her husband's life, dragged the son from the Buddhist monastery. She held him, simply, under a demonic spell, and as soon as he was released, he burst into a revolt, but unfortunately a revolt whose very character had been largely determined by her influence - a perverted expression of individuality.

What Lady, Carol and Vee did to Val Xavier, Mrs. Venables seems to have done to her son - with twice the vehemence of commitment.

But artist-homosexual-fugitive as he is, Sebastian really represents a far bleaker image of man than any preceding character in the Williams' canon. The homosexual, so far, has been an object of sympathy as well as revulsion, and this might suggest a somewhat sympathetic characterisation of Sebastian, but this is not the case in Suddenly. Like Williams' earlier homosexuals, Sebastian is lonely, an exile despite - or because of - his mother's eternal presence by his side; like them, too, he has met his violent death before the play opens. But unlike them, he is not a lonely rejected; rather, he is himself the loveless rejector. He is offered, on a platter, the regenerating sympathy, the rescue that Blanche denied Allan, or Brick denied Skipper. Catherine offers herself to Sebastian - not, it must be stressed, out of Desire, but precisely as an act of rescue that Blanche and Brick had failed to perform. "We walked through the wet grass to the great misty oaks," she says, "as if somebody was calling for help" [5P, p. 267]. But despite his vision of a suffering universe, he chooses, with a pride bordering on hubris, to think of himself as one above his kind, who can feed upon people like one of the carnivorous birds of the Encantadas [pp. 243-44]; and, as he watched, cruelly, the baby turtles being eaten, or fed the fruit flies to the Venus' Fly-trap in his garden, so is he fed to the band of children whom he had perverted. If his death is more violent than the suicide

of Allan or Skipper, it is largely because Williams' vision of fallen man, the fugitive, has itself undergone a change. The homosexuality of the previous characters is an act of ignorance, compared to Sebastian's; is followed by remorse, and their suicides are the culmination of a kind of expiation, miniature martyrdoms, one might almost say. But Sebastian, fallen and ignorant like them, claims superior knowledge of God and His ways, and acts on this assumed knowledge. The fallen man - committing further and deliberate transgression - his monstrous punishment fits the magnitude of his crime.

If the play still suggests a degree of compassion for Sebastian, it is because Williams has come to have the conviction that guilt is not an exceptional phenomenon. It growingly dominates human "civilisation" - both qualitatively and quantitatively, for the vast cruelty in the world is only a sum-total of the cruelties of individuals. Witness, for instance, Mrs. Holly and George - "loyal and lovely family types!" as one critic described them - willing to trade Catherine's pre-frontal lobe for the inheritance from Sebastian. They are not simply greedy individuals but representatives of a society in which they live and function. If in themselves they stand for the smaller cruelties of the human jungle, they contribute to the total evil by offering themselves as meat for the monsters who feed on them and grow fatter. The latter are often more intelligent: Mrs. Venables is gifted, intelligent, even "attractive", though in savagery she dwarfs the very sheriff of Two River County in Orpheus Descending. An ability

to rationalise their deeds aids them in their designs:

DOCTOR: You're such an innocent person that it doesn't occur to you, it obviously hasn't even occurred to you that anybody less innocent than you are could possibly interpret this offer of a subsidy as - well, as a sort of bribe?

MRS. VENABLES: (laughs, throwing her head back): Name it that - I don't care - There's just two things to remember. She's a destroyer. My son was a creator! - Now if my honesty's shocked you - pick up your little bag without the subsidy in it, and run away from this garden!

[5P p.251]

Or else they have "convictions" about their unique superiority as Sebastian had. The innocent, on the other hand, are subject to a great deal of uncertainty about themselves.⁶⁶ (Notice the doctor's speech in the above conversation; or Catherine: Somebody said once or wrote, once: 'We're all of us children in a vast kindergarten trying to spell God's name with the wrong alphabet blocks!' " [5P, p. 255]) They are, like Catherine, victimised, fragmented and reduced to what Eliot called "un-beings".

There is no heroism to conquer or redeem the evil. Even the one representative of the church (Eliot's "Red Rock" under whose shadow one might hope to see "fear in a handful of dust" yet hope for a final redemption), the initially sympathetic Sister Felicity, is essentially removed from the human struggle. The one hope for mankind seems to lie in a judicial attention on the part of those in search of "new" and "radical" truth to consider the "truth" of the story of the supposedly insane, the essentially innocent. But even these seekers after

66 See my discussion of Miller's The Crucible for a similar treatment of the relative tentativeness of the opinions of the "good".

truth must stake a great deal in the way of individual and personal considerations, for they are not immune to the disintegrating process of time. The all-white-clad Doctor, symbol of a total sensibility to truth, is not free from personal conflicts and an inner division:

My work is such a new and radical thing that people in charge of state funds are naturally a little scared of it and keep us on a small budget, so small that—. We need a separate ward for my patients, I need trained assistants, I'd like to marry a girl I cant afford to marry! -

[5P, pp. 249-50]

But notwithstanding these divisions, the possibility of goodness is not yet non-extant:

(Mrs. Venables springs with amazing power from her wheel-chair, stumbles erratically but swiftly toward the girl and tries to strike her with her cane. The Doctor snatches it from her and catches her as she is about to fall. She gasps hoarsely several times as he leads her toward the exit.)

MRS. VENABLES (offstage): Lion's View! State asylum, cut this hideous story out of her brain!

(Mrs. Holly sobs and crosses to George, who turns away from her, saying:)

GEORGE: Mom, I'll quit school, I'll get a job, I'll—

MRS. HOLLY: Hush, son! Doctor, can't you say something?

(Pause. The Doctor comes downstage. Catherine wanders out into the garden, followed by sister.)

DOCTOR (after a while, reflectively, into space): I think we ought at least to consider the possibility that the girl's story could be true.....

[Curtain]

[5P, p. 282]

SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH (1959) is perhaps Williams' blackest play to date. When it first opened, in 1956, in Carol Gables, Florida, it received lukewarm notices. Miami papers "took note of the need for additional polish, but much more of the likelihood that such polish would produce a very significant work."⁶⁷ Williams seems to have answered with such apologies as its being "a work in progress" - one which "had been undergoing continued change upto and including actual rehearsal."⁶⁸ Suddenly one summer, in 1959, Sweet Bird flew atop the Martin Beck on Broadway, evidently with the additional plumes demanded of it.⁶⁹ The notices were no more lukewarm: they were red hot with anger and indignation. It was a play of rot, a rotten play. Williams' supporters were bitterly disappointed: his detractors were at a dead loss to say something "original" - all the abuses had been hurled by the Williamsites themselves. Eric Bentley protested by not writing a review at all, and one of his disciples, Robert Brustein explained, as it were, the elder critic's silence by publishing two damaging articles on the play, one on each side of the Atlantic.⁷⁰ To say that one of them may have been the reason why no British repertory undertook to perform it might be too great a compliment to the judgement of a critic who is convinced

67, 68: According to an article called "Florida Premiere for New Tennessee Williams Play" [with photographs by "Pix"], a clipping of which was sent by a friend in the U.S. without any details of publication.

69 For instance the names of characters, as given in the above article, are much more straightforward - Phil Beam, Valerie, etc. as compared to the symbolistic-suggestive Chance Wayne, Heavenly, Boss, etc.

70 "Williams' Nebulous Nightmare", Hudson Review, XII (Summer 1959),

that not a single American play can be accused of being "literature"⁷¹ ("unless the playwright emigrated to Europe" he seems to be saying between his lips). However, Brustein and most others had good reason to clip the wings off Sweet Bird.

The play is literally laid on a "grand double bed" and the strange bedfellows are two human monsters - a male and a female. The former, Princess Kosmonopolis (pseudonym for Alexandra Del Lago), an aging Hollywood actress - a dramatic version of Mrs. Stone of the novel. The latter, Chance Wayne, a boy of waning chances to become a movie star. "Princess" is fleeing from failure into drink, drugs, oxygen and fornication; her partner-employee battens on her as a means to success through her money and prestige; feeds her frantic needs and his own; hides a taperecorder under the bed as a security through blackmail. However, love-making is his main talent: as a youth he had known a fifteen-year old girl, Heavenly Finley, whom he seduced and gave both a child and a venereal disease requiring surgical treatment resulting in her sterility. Compulsively he returns to the scene after several years, hoping to persuade his older mistress to take him and Heavenly to Hollywood and set them up in a screen career. He goes about flaunting his presence in town and invites the vengeance of the girl's father, Boss Finley, a racist politician with several lik-minded supporters headed by his worthless son, Tom. They threaten to castrate Chance - a punishment they have

255-60; and "Sweet Bird of Success", Encounter, XII (June, 1959)59-60
 71 See his "Why American Plays Are Not Literature",

recently meted out to a negro "agitator" who tried to heckle Boss in one of his television interviews. Princess offers to rescue Chance provided he accompanies her as a paid companion, but he refuses unless he can take Heavenly with him to achieve the dreams of his youth. The promised punishment knocks at his door, and he faces the situation rather unlike a man he has been made out to be.

Youth, however, is not the bird the characters are trying to catch in this play. It is only a means to an end they all struggle to fulfil, and the end is Success:

For years [says Princess] they told me that it was ridiculous of me to feel that I couldn't go back to the screen or the stage as a middle-aged woman. They told me I was an artist, not just a star whose career depended on youth. But I knew in my heart that the legend of Alexandra Del Lago couldn't be separated from an appearance of youth...

There's no more valuable knowledge than knowing the right time to go. RETIRED! Where to? To what? To the dead planet the moon...

There's nowhere else to retire to when you retire from an art, because, believe it or not, I really was once an artist. So I retired to the moon, but the atmosphere of the moon doesn't have any oxygen in it. I began to feel breathless, in that withered, withering country, of time coming after time not meant to come...

[Sweet Bird of Youth, p. 28] ⁷²

When success seems to be slipping by, they create other illusions to replace it.

Well, sooner or later, at some point in your life, the thing that you lived for is lost or abandoned, and then ...you die, or find something else... [p. 30]

72 Textual references are to the London edition published by Secker and Warburg, 1961

The illusion must be sustained or else they are castrated. This attitude, engendered by an inner emptiness, is not unique to the two central characters. Nor is the degeneration. For Chance's greatest adversary, Boss Finley, himself lives on it. Powerless - impotent as he is (his mistress Lucy has scrawled across the ladies' room mirror with lipstick that he is too old to "cut the mustard"), he is seeking power in public affairs. To sustain his illusion of success, he is prepared to castrate the vital. His physical castration of one negro is but a symbol of the political and spiritual castration of all negroes whom his political success relates to. His own daughter, moreover, is annihilated between the two equally corrupt sides. The moral destruction is total, and at the root of it is the negative aspect of the American dream. The final seemingly stoic acceptance of responsibility by Chance for his past and his transgression, together with the playwright's plea on his behalf for understanding, may seem like a ray of hope in the midst of black gloom, but it is a very bleak hope indeed.

Ken Tynan was right when he said:

In "Suddenly Last Summer"... the poet was slain and partly devoured by Spanish urchins, and the girl was threatened with mental castration... Now it seems, the urge is out in the open; in "Sweet Bird of Youth" the ingénue has lost the use of her sexual organs before the curtain rises, and an analogous deprivation awaits the hero immediately after it falls. Let us hope that the theme is at last exhausted, that by exhausting it Mr. Williams has achieved some kind of personal fulfilment, and that in the future he will be able to write with fewer nerve ends trailing...⁷³

72 Kenneth Tynan, "Ireland and Points West", New Yorker, XXXV (March 21 1959), 91-92

Williams does, indeed, seem to have exhausted the gunpowder that went into these middle plays, and the three works that followed at the heels of Sweet Bird of Youth - minor efforts as they are - indicate a much healthier and more hopeful outlook on the modern man and his world.

Period of Adjustment (1960) ("a serious comedy"), may be the slightest of Williams' works, but it is also the lightest. The period that the play spans is that which two couples spend trying to adjust to what threaten to be two failing marriages. Ralph Bates, a simple American, married his boss's daughter hoping to inherit a well-established business, but had to accept in the bargain a plain wife whom he cannot love. Completely dominated after six years by his immortal if ailing father-in-law, he suddenly rebels and resigns his job, only to find that his wife under the angry father's influence has left him. Enter Isabel Haverstick, new bride of Ralph's war-buddy George, and daughter of a puritanical father with a penchant for including moral instructions in her nightgown pocket - prayers such as "Oh Heavenly Father, give thy weak daughter strength to - resist the lusts of men. Amen." She seems to have been "abandoned" here by her husband because on the previous (wedding) night she was frightened into frigidity by his uncouth behaviour. As Ralph finishes explaining to her that her troubles mark only a period of adjustment, George arrives with a bottle of champagne, just in time for Dorothy returning to play the hostess to the newlyweds staying overnight. The dividing lines between love and hate, illusion and reality, virility and frigidity, understanding

and indifference, between the past and the present, the civilised and the bestial, so violently sharp in the earlier plays, seem to blur into a compromise. The curtain drops on two beds of marital felicity. Yet no simple solutions are offered in the play since none exist in life. Forgiveness is not total for failings hitherto accompanied by violent punishments. Ralph is bullied by his father-in-law and made to accept his unattractive wife; George is made to confess, publicly as it were, to a lack of the masculinity that he pretended to possess, before he can be bedded with his inhibited bride. Nor is living happily ever after guaranteed with any of the facility of insurance salesmanship. The American edition of the play ends with quite an unconventional ending: just as the fondling couples start to unfasten the tangled straps and buttons in the blissful darkness, the idyllic bungalow "sinks" a little further into the "cavern" over which it is built. Since most critics chose to read only a phallic symbolism in the sub-title "High Point over the Cavern" (implying a moving in for the sex act - which, no doubt, is implied), the "sinking" was eliminated from the London edition of the play. The producer at the Belgrade, Coventry, however, saw the duality of the pun and included the image by means of appropriate lighting and sound effects to imply pleasure over the grave itself - a recapitulation of the image suggested earlier by the honeymooning George and Isabel driving in a "funeral limousine". The brief epilogue writ large on the final curtain seemed to read: Acceptance is all!

Acceptance, too, is the keyword of the most recent of Williams'

plays. The last of these so far published in this country, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More (1964) is built around a situation potentially as explosive as the Alexandra Del Lago - Chance Wayne / Mrs. Stone - Paolo in the earlier works. A rich, aging, loveless actress, struggling desperately to clutch to the illusion of life that is gone — suddenly confronted with a rugged trespasser poet in animal skin pants. But Williams' newly evolved vision of peace-through-acceptance (suggested, too, by such stylistic devices as the Kabuki stage assistants reminiscent of an oriental calm - the Himalayan monastery that Sebastian rejected) so directs the events that although the bed becomes the bier, Mrs. Goforth's South-of-France villa does not sink into a cavern without her having learnt from Christopher Flanders the meaning and the acceptance of death.

In the preceding The Night of the Iguana (1962), probably the best of Williams' recent works, it is acceptance of life as well as death that concludes the drama. And "life" here is not represented by the procreative urge, but rather a way of living. Shannon, an ex-minister (defrocked for "fornication and heresy in the same week") turned tourist guide, is chaperoning a party including the "hysterical New England spinster" Hannah Jelkes, a painter, and her ninety-seven "years young" grandfather, Nonno, "a minor league poet with a major league spirit" in the process of his last poem after twenty years of inactivity. Her spinsterhood notwithstanding, Hannah is a saintly soul who believes that "chastity" is not the worst of things that life has to offer, and

with remarkable spirit she accompanies Nonno making a meagre livelihood together - he, by reciting poems, she, sketching portraits, in culinary establishments round the world. The present scene is a Mexican hotel atop a hill. Between Shannon and Hannah, we have the entire thesis and antithesis of the play. T. Lawrence Shannon is possibly suggestively named: Tennessee's Lawrence (?) - the Lawrence of Cried the Phoenix. As a priest, he found his congregation worshipping "a senile delinquent"; he sees God, like Sebastian, in "lightning... thunder, ...stray dogs vivisected." Hannah, on the other hand, is the epitome of the noblest in each of Williams' young heroines. She has the sensuous beauty of Heavenly Finley, the sensitivity of Blanche DuBois, and like Alma Winemiller, she is identified with the Gothic Cathedrals. And yet, she is spiritually stronger than any of them: "I am not a weak person," she says, and this is evidenced by her staunch pursuit of a profitless career, her care of a sickly old man, her ability to contain the "emotional anarchy" that ever threatens to derange her, her control over her unhappy memories - including those of her parents' death by accident when she was ten. She is no Lawrentian moth, for her psychic incapacity for physical "touch" - and her recognition of it - is accompanied by regrets for the "wonderful wife and mother she might have been."

While Shannon finds an echo of his physical being in the bawdy Mexican widow, Maxine, landlady of the hotel where the party is staying, he discovers, through contact with Hannah, an inner division

division within himself, for a part of his consciousness recognises that, not only the "life" represented by Maxine, but physical life even at its highest, is not all there is to Life. It is Hannah who guides his spiritual tour up the tortuous hill, by suggesting compassion instead of violence, by accepting his suffering while resisting his sensuous attempts to corrupt her, by combining her pity for him with a will to help him, by saving him as she saved her grandfather — through understanding.

However, it is not a straightforward dialectic between body and soul, good and evil. For, as already indicated, Hannah is not a disembodied soul but a human being. What is more, Shannon's own character contains the seeds of a synthesis. He has the vitality to take in sensuous experience, the mobility to pursue a quest, the capacity to recognise evil, the honesty to feel remorse. His sense of guilt, in fact, becomes so strong at times that he has to be hospitalised. As he stepped down the altar of the established church, deluded by his "heretical" image of God, he was already on the way to making for himself the discovery that textbook theology had failed to reveal to him — the true face of God. In Shannon, Williams has created with his exquisite talent for humanising a symbol, a living Christian Pilgrim, and regenerated him through a ceaseless search for the good as well as evil within himself, and a recognition of them in the world without through understanding of his fellow-being. The theme is echoed in the poetic progress of Nonno who, having completed his life's work, accepts

death as Shannon accepts life. Nonno's poem — completed just when Shannon releases from death the iguana, "one of God's creatures at the end of a rope [himself as much as the iguana] ...to scramble home safe and free" — speaks for the rebirth of both, nursed in each case by the ideally, perfectly beautiful Hannah:

How calmly does the orange branch
 Observe the sky begin to blanch
 Without a cry, without a prayer,
 With no betrayal of despair.

Sometime while night obscures the tree
 The zenith of its life will be
 Gone past forever, and from thence
 A second history will commence.

A chronicle no longer gold,
 A bargaining with mist and mould,
 And finally the broken stem
 The plummeting to earth; and then

An intercourse not well designed
 For beings of a golden kind
 Whose native green must arch above
 The earth's obscene, corrupting love.

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

O Courage, could you not as well
 Select a place to dwell,
 Not only in that golden tree
 But in the frightened heart of me?

ii

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' vision of the unheroic modern man has undergone gradual modification with every play he has written over the past two decades and, on the evidence of his most recent work, it might safely be said that he is yet to reach his point of finality as regards the contemporary moral condition. But, when in 1945, he burst upon the American theatrical scene, he already had a carefully worked out artistic credo which has governed much of his dramatic form up to the present. In his Production Notes to The Glass Menagerie, he stated:

Everyone should know nowadays the unimportance of the photographic in art: the 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.

[4P, p. x]

"Reality", as the playwright perceived it, was to be presented in non-realistic terms. He carried out this manifesto in the play which it preceded. While no one can deny the "reality" of the four characters in The Glass Menagerie, or question the authenticity of Tom's story, the form of the play is far from realistic. "Yes, I have tricks in my pocket," says Tom —

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.

[4P, p. 2]

One of the means that Tom (as well as his author) most pervasively employs to clothe harsh reality in the guise of "gentle" illusion is to lift human beings out of the immediacy of their existence onto a plane of relative abstraction, blurring the photographic focus a little, perhaps, but by endowing them with a certain autonomy, accentuating their essential reality. Tom tells the audience of his "poet's weakness for symbols"; elsewhere, Williams tells of his:

I can't deny that I use a lot of those things called symbols but being a self-defensive creature, I say that symbols are nothing but the natural speech of drama... We all have in our conscious and unconscious minds a great vocabulary of images, and I think all human communication is based on these images as are our dreams; and a symbol in a play has only one legitimate purpose which is to say a thing more directly and beautifully than it could be said in words.

[Foreword to Camino Real, 4P, pp. 232-33]

It is interesting to note that Williams does not make a formal distinction between the "image" and the "symbol". The reason for this overlapping is inherent in his words above. While he includes verbal imagery as part of his symbolistic technique, he means to employ, too, another kind of imagery, the extra-literary, the dramatic. "...more directly and beautifully than it could be said in words..." provides the clue. He makes it clear in a succeeding sentence:

... I repeat that symbols, when used respectfully, are the purest language of plays. Sometimes it would take page after tedious page of exposition to put across an idea that can be said with an object or a gesture on the lighted stage.

[Ibid.]

Two things are obvious: first, although a good deal of "imagery" (by

which the playwright implies a kind of archetypal imagery) must go into the building of a cumulative symbolic effect, it must invariably be accompanied and reinforced by extra-literary symbolism; two, the seemingly abundant use of symbols (and images) — and it can be quite extravagant in Williams, at times — is, at least according to the playwright's intention, there really to effect a kind of dramatic economy and directness.

The play to which these remarks are prefixed is rather an extreme instance, so that most critics are agreed that, strictly speaking, it falls out of the generic boundaries of drama, verging perhaps on pure allegory. But Williams' special brand of symbolism pervades almost all his work, and one might hazard a personal opinion that it does succeed, in most cases, in achieving the economy it aims at. It manifests itself primarily in Williams' characters — their names, appearance, features and deformities, their racial and mythical backgrounds — but no less in the sets, props, visual and sonic effects against which the action unfolds itself. His symbolic characterisation occurs at several levels.

At its simplest, it results in — "types" would be inaccurate — in two dimensional "shadows". Consider, for instance, Eunice and Steve in A Streetcar Named Desire. They have both a symbolic and a realistic function to perform — although they never acquire anything like "roundness" as characters. Steve, along with Pablo, is necessary to make up the quadrille for the poker game. And Eunice is there to reassure Stella that she had best disbelieve the story of Blanche's rape and acquiesce in the

common verdict on her mental condition. But symbolically, the neighbour-couple are representative samples of the social norm, and since at the same time they are "shadows" of the Kowalskis, of Stella's acceptance of "normalcy" in marriage with Stanley, their happy existence in a state of perpetual compromise provides, in the end, a sad comment on Stella's betrayal of her sister.

The literary society assembled in the rectory parlour in Summer and Smoke comprises some more of these peripheral people. Rosemary, who never gets beyond the poet's date of birth in her "paper" on Blake, is there only to establish the fake nature of the pseudo-intellectual activity. Mrs. Bassett, who hastens Alma to report John's riotous living to his father, is essentially an "image" of a nosey neighbourhood. Roger Dormeus, the insubstantial, effeminate, slumbering, middle-aged suitor to Alma, is really a foil to the vital young doctor. I was once invited to lead a discussion at the "Crit." Evening with a company that put on the play⁷³ —almost asked to play a Roger Dormeus without even a lady to focus my literary enthusiasm on — and I found the producer willing to concede at least one of my complaints about the production: that he and his players had endowed these "shadows" with more flesh-and-blood than the playwright had intended. He explained, however, that strict faithfulness to the text in this matter might have resulted in losing the continued interest of the supporting actresses, which an amateur group

73 Leicester Drama Society's production by John Ghent at the Little Theatre, Leicester, November, 1967

could at no cost afford. The fact remains, however, that although there is enough scope in the play to revitalise these characters on the stage, their real existence in its structure is functional. Flat as they may be individually, together they constitute a kind of density and, despite the sparing treatment they receive, provide a vivid social backcloth to the individual drama. The author's satirical use of this small group, moreover, represents a proportionate satire on the larger "group" they represent — on society itself.

There are other characters who are choric symbols. The most striking examples are the prostitute (without a single line) and the Mexican flower vendor in Streetcar, who comment directly on the two major crises in Blanche's "present" life. Bessie and Flora in The Rose Tattoo express a condition at once comic and horrible.

Yet others are depersonalised institutional extensions. The nurse and the doctor in Streetcar, and the nun in Suddenly represent two of the social institutions which hold themselves responsible for the mental and spiritual health of the community. Their indifference speaks for itself. Mrs. VENABLES and Catherine's mother and brother are symbols respectively of the absolute power that corrupts not only itself but the world it controls, and the greed that is so epidemic as to offer no resistance to corrupting power. The passing salesman in The Rose Tattoo is another "image" — of the absolute commercialisation of society, of money as an institution.

Symbolism is even more obvious in the names of characters and objects

— animal, vegetable and inanimate. The WINGFIELD family in Menagerie are, each in his own way, on the flight; BLANCHE DuBOIS says her name means "white woods", and she translates her sister's name, "Stella for a star!" — the star almost of her fate; ALMA, we are told, is "Spanish for Soul"; the streetcars on Blanche's route are DESIRE and CEMETERY, just as the neighbourhood itself is called ELYSIAN FIELDS; Maggie describes herself as "a cat on a hot tin roof"; her productive sister-in-law, Mae, is remotely linked with the lushness of spring; GOOPER, whatever it means, is a repellent enough image of mendacity by the very sound of his name; the poet in Suddenly is named after the saint whose picture hangs like death itself on his drawing room wall; the nun is called, in an Eliotian antithetically ironic manner, FELICITY; the unfortunate sufferer in Sweet Bird, likewise, is called HEAVENLY; her father, another symbol of corrupt political power, is BOSS Finley; the degenerate young man's "chances" are "wa[yn]ing"; Del Lago's pseudonym PRINCESS KOSMONOPOLIS is a comment on another, almost universal power that dominates today's world — Glamour; the near-impotent George, who lacks a symbolic "stick" is given one, ironically again, in his surname: HAVERSTICK... the list could go on endlessly, but the obvious question it raises is: Are Williams' characters no more, then, than mere "Humours"? The answer must be sought in the relation between the initial emotional response that these labels evoke and the detailed working out of them in the course of the development of characters, "objects" and places. To begin with, not all this nomenclature strikes

as artificial. Some, like "Desire", "Cemeteries", "Elysian Fields" are actual names. Some others are at least credible. Alma is the daughter of a clergyman preaching in a community with some Spanish population. It would not be unusual for him to give his daughter a Spanish name; nor even to call her "Soul", firstly because of his vocation in the church, and secondly because of his personal disappointment in the body: his wife, the "cross" he has to bear is after all no more than a human "body" since her infantile retrogression. Sister Felicity is by no means an eccentric departure from the usual rolls of a Catholic convent.

But not all symbolic tags attached to Williams' characters are "naturalistically" credible. The oppressive "fox" in You Touched Me!, the cat, Val's snakeskin jacket, all the roses in The Rose Tattoo, are, on the surface at least much too obvious impositions. However, what matters is not the natural-ness or otherwise of the symbols but their integration into the thematic pattern of the play. And this is where the obvious symbols are strengthened, on the one hand by naturalistic background of the characters, and by larger, more subtle and consistent and coherent symbols which these minor ones, more or less, serve.

Alma would be a failure as a dramatic symbol if she were to depend for her entire explication on the meaning of her Spanish name. She is aided, first of all, by the fact that her name is a Spanish name, which implies a disorientation from the native Glorious Hill values. She is an outsider to her immediate environment. (Belongs to "a more elegant age, such as the Eighteenth Century in France"). Her idealistic lyricism,

is made to withstand the test of endurance against a background which itself is a highly evocative symbol:

There are two ... "interior" sets, one being the parlor of an Episcopal Rectory and the other the home of a doctor next door to the rectory. [Both symbols of the values we "worship"] The architecture of these houses is barely suggested [a reminder that they are symbols] but is of an American Gothic design of the Victorian era. [Joined by time despite their mutual opposition] There are no actual doors or windows or walls. [Hollowness of the modern condition?] Doors and windows are represented by delicate framework of the Gothic design. [We still pretend to subscribe to the humanist values]. These frames have strings of ivy clinging to them, the leaves of emerald and amber [life cannot completely reject them.] Sections of walls are used only where they are functionally required [human beings never fail to find a rationalisation for their acts]. There should be a fragment of wall in back of the rectory sofa [we cannot get away from the past] supporting a romantic landscape in a gilt frame [the constant reaching out for the unattainable]. In the doctor's house there should be a section of wall to support the chart of anatomy [no romantic painting, this one; further accent on the body-soul polarity] Chirico has used fragmentary walls and interiors in a very evocative way in his painting called "Conversation among the Ruins" [Final declaration of the playwright's commitment to metaphysical abstraction].

[Production Notes to Summer and Smoke
4P, p. 158]

As a still picture even it would be a highly suggestive set. It has the meaningfulness of the sets of some of Shakespeare's comedies. The polarity, for instance, of the Forest and the Court that underlies the essential structure of As You Like It. Or perhaps it is closer to the dialectic of the ethereal and the earthy, the poetic and the comic of Twelfth Night. The Duke's palace set against the box-tree garden, the languishing lover against the drunken Uncle Toby and his riotous mates.

But while the Shakespearean comedy, concerned primarily with more relaxed levels of experience, can afford a certain "distance" between the two termini, and employ a Valentine or a disguised Viola to bridge it, the Williams play is essentially concerned with a much greater extremity of predicament. The civic park, the town prison — or what you will — that may separate the poetry in the palace from the cakes and ale in the box-tree garden, would be altogether too much space between the romantic painting and the chart of anatomy. For whereas the embodiment of one or the other set of values may live in one of the two houses, they are never far from the other house. The "neighbourhood" of the two is important, and the angel above the drinking fountain is there to remind us that it is an eternal partnership. A partnership, not so much of the two characters, but one which gives explication to the central metaphor of the play, the divided consciousness of man — the "doppelganger" that Alma eventually discovers within herself.

Non-linguistic symbolism is used even more effectively in A Street-car Named Desire. The characters go as far as language would take them to reveal their motives, actions and justifications. Blanche's explanation of her past, like that of her own and her sister's names, is carefully couched in naturalistic language, but there is a lot that she herself does not know. Most of these unconscious motivations are conveyed through symbols. Her own view of character would certainly not appear to indicate the "moth" that her clothes do; the flimsy white dress certainly says more than a long monologue would. The initial suggestion

is echoed by her unspoken uneasiness in the face of harsh reality, and her fear of exposure, symbolised by her covering of the naked lamp with an oriental lantern. Her constant prambulations to the bathroom, ostensibly to "quiet her nerves", is a large symbol of a kind of cleansing ceremony she is trying to perform. But the bathroom, a kind of altar to her, is no more than a receptacle for excretion to her brother-in-law. He and his gang are similarly explained by the visual symbols that swarm the poker scene.

THE POKER NIGHT

There is a picture of Van Gogh's of a billiard parlor at night. The kitchen now suggests that sort of lurid nocturnal brilliance, the raw colors of childhood's spectrum. Over the yellow linoleum of the kitchen table hangs an electric bulb with a vivid green glass shade. The poker players - Stanley, Steve, Mitch and Pablo - wear coloured shirts, solid blues, a purple, a red-and-white check, a light green [that must be Mitch], and they are men at the peak of their physical manhood, as coarse and powerful as the primary colors. There are vivid slices of watermelon on the table, whiskey bottles and glasses. The bedroom is relatively dim with only the light that spills between the portieres and through the wide window on the street.

[4P, p. 88]

The scene, itself a primary-colour painting, echoing the one that hangs within it, is a description of Stanley's Elysian Fields, and saves the playwright any number of expository speeches. If its "lurid" harmony suggests a degree of "sympathy" for a desperate return to primitive vitality, the vitality is not altogether isolated from a proportionate degree of savagery. It does reinforce the nominal symbolism of the two streetcars that have brought Blanche hither. And it does not contra-

her later comments about the caveman existence of a jungle that it represents to Blanche, for on a realistic plane the violent fight that ensues is inherent in the visual composition itself. It is blended, moreover, with the larger symbol of the play – the heroine's progressive insanity. The two threads are spun together in the critical scene preceding Blanche's destruction where Williams gives Orphic voices to the night:

(Lurid reflections appear on the walls around Blanche. The shadows are of a grotesque and menacing form...
 ..The night is filled with inhuman voices like cries in a jungle. The shadows and lurid reflections move sinuously as flames along the wall spaces. Through the back wall of the rooms, which have become transparent, can be seen the sidewalk. A prostitute has rolled a drunkard....

[4P, p. 143]

In some of the later plays, Williams' symbolism grows much more complex, and what appear to be "obvious" symbols are really only a fragment of the overall design. To single them out is to do violence to the structure of the play. The poet's name in Suddenly Last Summer was mentioned above. Taken by itself it would certainly arouse suspicions about the effectiveness of the technique. But one has to realise that it is but one of the several theatrical tokens by which we recognise the all-pervading symbol of death that looms large over the drama. Death is manifest, not only in Sebastian's name, and the picture of Saint Sebastian on the wall, but in the Encantadas episode, in the insectivorous plant in the garden, and above all, in Catherine's story which reveals how the beautiful and unwitting girl was used [death of her femininity]

by the homosexual cousin to procure boys who finally devoured their seducer. The various images are made practical in the "business" on the stage, yet add immensely to the internal interpretation of the past and present events.

Death, again, is symbolised in the set of Orpheus Descending. The "hell" into which Orpheus descends is a dreary drygoods store, in itself an image of the ordinary life in a contemporary Southern town, sterile and commercial, which offers but "dry goods" at best, a life which is, in fact, hell, populated by the shades of the doomed, BUT presided over by a vengeful dying proprietor from his deathbed upstairs. Around the sound of Val's Orphic guitar - the magical music of the dark god - are woven aural images of the dead - death cries, inarticulate prophetic portents and the baying of hounds, until the final warning of the protagonist comes in the negro's wild cry:

(The Negro nods, then throws back his turkey neck and utters a series of sharp barking sounds that rise to a sustained cry of great intensity and wildness. The cry produces a violent reaction in the building. Beulah and Dolly run out of the store. Lady does not move but she catches her breath. Dog and Pee Wee run down the stairs with ad libs and hustle the Negro out of the store, ignoring Lady, as their wives call: "Pee Wee!" and "Dawg!" outside on the walk. Val sweeps back the alcove curtain and appears as if the cry were his cue. Above, in the sick room, hoarse outraged shouts that subside with exhaustion...

[5P, pp. 363-64]

And the reaper is already knocking at the door from within as well as without. The destroying hounds, apparently symbolic so far, now appear to have been absorbed into the realistic design as well through

through their incessant cries. Williams may have got the technique from O'Neill, but the tom-tom in The Emperor Jones remains a pure symbol, and is not really as well integrated with the realistic atmosphere of the play as the Negro and the hounds in Orpheus. The destroyed, likewise, are both symbolically and realistically represented in the aural and visual composition of the Williams play. Lady's intention to open a "confectionery" is, at a facile level, an extension of her business now that she expects the total responsibility of it to fall upon her shoulders. At the same time, the confectionery set, partly seen through an arched door in the drygoods store, and hung with coloured lanterns (more akin to Blanche's lantern despite the colour, and quite the opposite of Stanley's "coloured lights" despite the obvious resemblance), is a typical Williams' image of the poetry of life, always lying on the fringe of reality - a kind of Eden, offering "sweets", not dry goods, colour instead of drabness. The close juxtaposition of the victim and the victimiser, as it were, lends the ethos a kind of tragic inevitability. The internal interpretative mechanism is provided again by the nominal symbols. First, by the title of the play and its adequate mythic parallelism; but much more subtly and effectively, by the protagonist's deviations from his mythological counterpart: his snakeskin jacket, Williams' symbol for the poetic purity of "something wild", and his earthly name, Val Xavier (Valentine Saviour - Love-Saviour), at once a human and a Christ-figure. Viewed in this triple perspective, he and his drama lend itself to a multiplicity of response at several different levels, and

properly assimilated into the verbal imagery of the dialogues, they acquire a depth not usually associated with the "humours of Elizabethan comedy.

This assimilation is more and more in evidence in the later plays. There is a grotesque sense of unity about the surrealist scenic design and the emotional atmosphere of Suddenly Last Summer. The curtain rises on a set described in the following terms:

(The set may be as unrealistic as the decor of a dramatic ballet. It represents part of a mansion of Victorian Gothic style in the Garden District of New Orleans on a late afternoon, between late summer and early fall. The interior is blended with a fantastic garden which is more like a tropical jungle, or forest, in the prehistoric age of giant fer-forests when living creatures had flippers turning to limbs and scales to skin. The colours of this jungle-garden are violent, especially since it is steaming with heat after rain. There are massive tree-flowers that suggest organs of a body, torn out, still glistening with undried blood; there are harsh cries and sibilant hissings and thrashing sounds in the garden as if it were inhabited with beasts, serpents and birds, all of savage nature.....)

MRS. V: Yes, this was Sebastian's garden...

[5P, p. 239]

Sebastian is no more a fiction. Some vague image of him, not far from the reality about him, has already begun to emerge, and all that will be said of him is to derive its focus and definition from the emotive centre predated by this initial "painting". While the symbol itself is not only a means of communication but also an interpretative mechanism, further internal interpretation is provided by the consciousness through which the events are viewed. The essential rational correlative for the experience represented is Catherine's "insanity". Williams has already

used progressive insanity as an instrument for the organisation and interpretation, as well as perception - to a certain extent, of experience. Alma in Summer and Smoke inherits a degree of mental aberration which remains dormant until all hope of her idealistic fulfilment begins to seem over, when it suddenly comes to the surface and Alma, like Mrs. Winemiller, finds that the "the pieces [of the jigsaw puzzle] don't fit." Much of the vision of Elysian Fields, similarly, proceeds from the heat oppressed brain of Blanche, and her "insanity" notwithstanding, most of the objectivity of the play springs from, is even associated with, her perception rather than from the brutally cold "sanity" of her antagonist. With Orestes, Hamlet and Lady Julie in the background, one need not be so quick in attributing Williams' use of the device to his alleged "sensationalism", yet must recognise its limitation in that the audience is always in two minds about the validity of such an interpretation as a "deranged" character would put on the events. On the other hand, it has the supreme advantage over a more "normal" objectifying point-of-view — namely the very extremity of human circumstance that it represents. The reader or spectator is always willing to concede like the doctor in Suddenly that "the girl's story could be true".

In any case, Williams seems to have realised the limitation, and he turned to a much more "acceptable" use of "consciousness" in some of his other later plays. Mrs. Vee Talbot in The Rose Tattoo is, as a character, reduced to the dimensions of Mrs. Winemiller. The only avowedly "visionary" character in the Williams pantheon, and endowed with some objective

statements of "truth" not easily apprehensible to the sane characters, she is nonetheless kept at a level of caricature. Greater "visionary" powers, on the other hand, are vested in Brick in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and Alexandra del Lago in Sweet Bird of Youth. The common factor in their physical existence is their intoxication, Brick's from alcohol, Alexandra's from drug. Despite the Christian and non-Christian puritan contempt for alcoholism and drug-addiction, the inebriated visionary is a kind of archetype in both the Eastern and the Western collective unconscious, and it is possible that Williams depended, in thus representing the condition, on the primordial sympathetic response to it, but his intent is obvious in both plays. Brick discovers "truth" in alcohol which, for him, momentarily arrests the flow of experience to provide critical insight:

I have to hear that little click in my head [he says] that makes me peaceful. Usually I hear it sooner than this, sometimes as early as - noon, but -
 - Today, it's - dilatory...
 - I just haven't got the right level of alcohol in my bloodstream yet!

[5P, pp. 52-53]

By describing it as "a mechanical thing" he forestalls any suspicion in the audience response as to his "pretentiousness". To Alexandra, again, the chief rationalising apparatus through which she perceives "truth" in her experience is her drug.

However, such a use of point-of-view remains open to the usual objection raised against what is described as a "narrow" objectivity in the point-of-view novel - or in any dramatic novel, for that matter.

The objection would certainly be valid if the dramatic action consisted entirely of external action, or if the "consciousness" in the play were to be totally located in one character. In Williams' Menagerie, it is located in one person - Tom; but even there, the action is largely internal; the experience is being relived in memory. In the later plays of Williams, it is a much more impersonal "consciousness" largely because of the abnormal condition of the person representing it. But perhaps the real answer to the "narrowness" charge is provided by the fact that Williams is not using "consciousness" as an isolated device. The key-character represents this limited objectivity, but we are given adequate symbolic direction as to how much of what he perceives as truth is to be accepted. He is invariably subordinated to a wider frame provided by the larger symbol of the particular play, and through our knowledge of the particular state of mind of the pivotal character, the playwright leaves the final verdict to us - the audience. And when we choose to take events, or certain negatively intended but inherent interpretations of the events, at their face value without applying our own awareness of reality to them, the fault is ours, not the playwright's.

Another frequent criticism of the dramatic structure of Williams' plays has been his "addiction" to create powerful scenes. Signi Falk, after quoting a passage ("...the unimportance of the photographic in art, etc.") juxtaposes two other statements of Williams, one an appreciation by Williams of the amateur group called "The Mummers" of Saint

Louis and their director, Willard Holland, for producing some of Williams' early work; Williams had written, "Holland's work never failed to deliver, and when I say deliver I mean s[h]ock!":....It was like the definition of what I think theater is. Something wild, something exciting, something that you are not used to. Offbeat is the word." Falk's paraphrase of this "definition" runs as follows: "...the principle of delivering, somewhere between the opening and the closing curtain, a good hard punch - a kind of knock-out blow, evidently."⁷⁴ First of all it must be denied that Williams regards the stage as "something wild" in the sense of a jungle where the playwright has a lion's licence. He depicts violence and degeneration because they are there in our life today, and one wonders whether the historian of tomorrow will not record ours as "the age of violence". But, from a purely aesthetic point of view, the irrationality and the "shock" to which Mr. Falk objects, are valuable dramatic devices. Williams' fundamental commitment to show the modern man the root of his suffering necessitates playing out humanity's crisis without any sugar-coating, to give its tortured consciousness concrete shape, which, in turn, calls for the rejection of the conventional ethical systems. This rejection necessarily makes his dramatic world seem irrational. And the shock is intended for but one purpose: to ensure the spectator's recognition of his moral condition by exposing his public as well as private sins. But, Mr. Falk

74 Signi Falk, Tennessee Williams, p. 174

goes on, "The two statements, taken together, may explain why Williams has never concerned himself with the organic development of drama but rather with highly charged dramatic scenes that will deliver a good shock..."⁷⁵ and ends by calling Williams "a vivid and exciting scene-wright".

One has only to consider one of Williams' "methods" as a writer to realise that this very organic wholeness, which Falk denies him, is his chief preoccupation as a craftsman. An idea takes root in an insignificant short story of his, is rewritten into a one-act play, expanded into a full-length play - be it under production or not - Williams keeps revising it for months, adding and eliminating characters, shaping and reshaping with great flexibility, dropping it for years sometimes to return to it and recast the whole structure. (Battle of Angels should be a convincing example of the last activity.) There is more than continuity about his writing: there is interaction, re-use of situations in an entirely metamorphosed shape, frequent use of a favourite theme, that should impart to any writer's work a homogeneity. Satisfaction comes to him, not out of having delivered a "good hard punch - ... a knock-out blow" for its own sake, but of having found the most harmonious formal design for the idea that has been haunting him. Whatever the technique he employs - be it realism, expressionism, surrealism, or a blend of the three - what determines the final form is a dominant moral symbol

75 Ibid.

(and not a favourite, shocking scene) and a principle of fluidity in form.

An interesting hunch, if not altogether conclusive evidence, as to Williams' preoccupation with this principle of fluidity may be sought in a single recurring metaphor in his non-dramatic writing. "...the moon splashed avenue of trees," "the sun in a beneficent flood," "something liquid and warm in the air like the womb of the mother remembered a long way off," "the restless waves of moonlit branches," are but a few random examples from the One Arm volume; "We live on cliffs above such moaning waters!" "Those rhythmic tides had now withdrawn from her body, leaving it like a tideless estuary on which desire rested like the moon's image on a calm sheet of water;" "Indolence and sensuality flowed between the two of them like the commingling of two clear, tranquil streams under a shadow of willows..." from The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone. The image of water is perhaps as old as water itself. It is related, in the legend of the descent of the Ganges, with regeneration and purification in Hindu mythology; rain is essential to the Chinese a fortnight before and a fortnight after a certain festival [see Lin Yu Tang, The Importance of Living]. T.S.Eliot, who seems to have drawn on these sources, represents it in this very context, and the slight hope for suffering mankind is represented by him in the three Da's uttered by the thunder which precedes rain. To a certain extent, Williams, too, may be said to associate human regeneration and renewal with it through maternity. But essentially it represents, above all, flow and rhythm in his unconscious.

As it might appear from the phrases above, he relates it, too, to the past-in-the-present, and this is where it becomes inextricable from the thematic structure of his plays. For after all, if The Glass Menagerie is a memory play, then memory must follow a fluent pattern of rhythm. And one would like to think it does. Which may be the reason Williams abandoned the conventional act-division and adhered to seven scenes, one leading to the other in a rhythmic pattern. In his setting for Summer and Smoke, Williams insists, "Everything possible should be done to give an unbroken fluid quality to the sequence of scenes." [4P, p.158]

Kazan "broke up" Streetcar into eleven "images":

1. Blanche comes to the last stop at the end of the line.
2. Blanche tries to make a place for herself.
3. Blanche breaks them apart, but when they come together, Blanche is more alone than ever!
4. Blanche, more desperate because more excluded, tries the direct attack and make the enemy who will finish her.
5. Blanche finds that she is being tracked down for the kill. She must work fast.
6. Blanche suddenly finds, suddenly makes for herself the only possible, perfect man for her.
7. Blanche comes out of the happy bathroom to find that her own doom has caught up with her.
8. Blanche fights her last fight. Breaks down. Even Stella deserts her.
9. Blanche's last desperate effort to save herself by telling the whole truth. The truth dooms her.
10. Blanche escapes out of this world. She is brought back by Stanley and destroyed.
11. Blanche is disposed of. 76

Whatever a critic's opinion about Kazan's staging of the play, no one would dispute his "analysis" of its structure. And where exactly, then, are we to find the "knock-out blow" in the above chart of its anatomy? It is a flow that might just as well be associated with the soothing

flow of water in the bathroom that is restoring some of Blanche's lost "rhythm" to her shattered nerves.

The same principle of rhythm marks the highly evocative dialogue of Williams' plays. There are, no doubt, some direct "sermons" delivered by the characters directly to the audience - what Kazan calls "arias", but they are no more obtrusive than the purple passages in Shakespeare. The proper dialogue, on the other hand, is quite another matter. Lacking myself a first-hand acquaintance with the Southern idiom - not being a native speaker of English, for that matter - I can, I think, depend on the authority of Southerners like Harold Clurman and Paris Leary as to the authenticity of Williams' speeches, their precise correspondance to the patterns of actual speech of the South. Possibly, Williams is at an advantage over, say, O'Neill or Miller in that the South, being still somewhat separated from the mainstream of American culture, must have (like Ireland for Yeats, Synge or O'Casey) a wealth of ready-made linguistic patterns to offer its writers, and to lend their work a kind of vitality and poetry of life. Be that as it may, as a common reader and playgoer, one can feel the bubbling, rising emotion that, quite apart from all theatrical "devices" the sheer cataract of words arouses in scene after scene, mood after mood, in a play like Cat on a Hot Tin Roof or even Period of Adjustment. One never feels quite the same heart-to-heart communion in the language of even the greatest of American playwrights, Eugene O'Neill.

Joseph Wood Krutch warned Williams at the opening of The Glass

Menagerie that "a hard, substantial core of shrewd observation and deft, economical characterisation [is] enveloped [in Menagerie] in a fuzzy haze of pretentious, sentimental, pseudo-poetic verbiage."⁷⁷

The common opinion is that Williams has not heeded the well-meant caution: a close look at his work over the past two decades would show that more often than not he has, and for the rest, he has proved Krutch wrong. The hard, gemlike diction of Brecht is not for him. His means are entirely emotive, and he has increasingly endeavoured to unify the various strands in this pattern. He had probably done with the pseudo-epic theatre after the notorious "screen legends" in Menagerie. Early in the 'sixties, he reiterated his position:

...poetry [he said] doesn't have to be words. In the theatre it can be situations, it can be silences. Colloquial, completely unheightened language can be more poetic, I think. My great *bête noire* as a writer has been a tendency to what people call... to poeticize, you know, and that's why I suppose I've written so many Southern heroines. They have the tendency to gild the lily, and they speak in a rather florid style which seems to suit me because I write out of emotion, and I get carried away by the emotion.⁷⁸

Emotion, in the theatre of Williams, arises through a series of montages of language, music, mime, dance, line, colour and form and the play of electric light, which, together, flood "the dusty shell of the auditorium with "an almost liquid warm of sympathies..."⁷⁹

76 Kazan, op. cit.

77 Krutch, "Drama", Nation, CLX (April, 14, 1945), 424

78 Williams, in Lewis Funke and John E. Booth, "Williams on Williams"

79 Williams, "The Timeless World of a Play", [Preface to The Rose Tattoo] Five Plays, p. 129

Many a man of the theatre has felt its power without ever having attained the complete satisfaction of having communicated it fully to the audience. To name even a few of them would be to repeat some of the history of the contemporary Western theatre. Here's how one of them feels in this part of the world:

He weaves more a pattern of light and shade, of contrasting rhythms and subtle music... He has done more than any dramatist to wean the theatre from the outmoded realistic conventions of the last eighty years... and to make it into a healthy pranking child once again, full of whim and charm and magic; sometimes violent, sometimes softly poetic ... Audiences respond to him as a magnet finds true metal, unquestioningly and secure in the knowledge that this is the true attraction between author and audience. Some, he can and does offend; it is a measure of his power as a dramatist that he strikes hard and strikes surely at the bastions of false morality.⁸⁰

One of those whom Williams' vision, or his ethics, does "offend" has words not very different as far as his power in the theatre is concerned:

He has caught the true quality of experience, it is cloudy and fiercely charged, and the human beings are live in crisis... The crises of Williams are never common. They are the creation of a very strange and very special imagination, potent enough and poetic enough to impose itself on an audience and hold it in a common trance. He is a theatre magician, invoking the lightning of emotion, releasing the dove of instinct, holding in fanlike suspension a brilliant pack of cards peopled with symbols and spectres.⁸¹

There is time yet for some of the reservations to be withdrawn.

Peter Hall, "Tennessee Williams: Notes on the Moralists," Encore, June-July, 1957 [No pagination]

Marya Mannes, "The Morbid Magic of Tennessee Williams," loc. cit.

II

THE COMMONER'S FATE: ARTHUR MILLER

THE name Arthur Miller means different things to different people; or,,at any rate, different things on different occasions. Author of Death of a Salesman; winner of numerous playwriting awards; husband of Marilyn Monroe; the guy who got mixed up with the U.S. Congress House Committee on Un-American Activities; the millionaire scriptwriter who loves to play baseball with the cameramen, discuss horses with the cowboys, hang on to subway straps... The plays have provoked as wide and varied a comment as has the man: they have interested not only men of the theatre and literary critics, but the sociologist, the psychiatrist, the businessman, the liberal thinker, the Christian, the Jew, the father, the son, the Russian and the Scandanavian. Literary judgement itself has been divided. Some have hailed his drama as the coming-of-age of the American theatre; the truest tragedy of the times some few; others dismiss it as a series of statements in self-defence; yet others have pointed out that he is perpetually attempting to reconcile the irreconcilables: prose and verse; realism and "poetry"; the trivial

and the tragic. Eric Bentley, for instance, wrote of Death of a Salesman:

...what has become of the attack on the "American way"? Has it been successfully submused under the larger heading "the human way"? That is what Mr. Miller's admirers tell us. The impression I had was not of the small purpose being included within the large, but of the two blurring each other. The "tragedy" destroys the social drama; the social drama keeps the "tragedy" from having a genuinely tragic stature.¹

Bentley represents the majority opinion in denying the Miller theatre what he describes as the "stature" of tragedy, or even of "tragedy". However, most critics concede that Miller's work represents "social drama". Again, the subtle unanimity itself implies widely different tones in the voices of those who have for once chosen to agree. For when used disparagingly, the term "social drama" nowadays carries the insinuation that the work under discussion is deliberately didactic - "preachy" may be nearer the spirit - and, like a problem play, is limited in scope, and therefore in literary merit. It is at once associated with party-line literature born of a Marxist aesthetic, and consequently unfit for consumption in a free, Western democracy.

Whatever nuances the critics may attach to the expression, Miller would be the last person to disown his devotion to drama of serious social questioning:

The social drama, as I see it, is the mainstream and the antisocial drama a bypass. I can no longer take with

1 "Back to Broadway", Theatre Arts, XXXIII (November, 1949), 13

ultimate seriousness a drama of individual psychology written for its own sake however full it may be of insight and precise observation...²

For Miller, the theatre is essentially a forum for the clarification, if not generation, of ideas that – for better or worse – determine the shape of human society. The academic quibbles about the definition of tragedy, the considerations of structure and form, of the "business of stage", are all of secondary importance. Ever since his first successful play, All My Sons (1947), was produced on Broadway, he has been constantly described as an "Ibsenite". In the particular context of All My Sons, the similarities discerned were, to a considerable extent, structural: it was a well-made play, it began just before the eventual climax of the story, and so on. But Miller's own account of his debt to the Norwegian master has been somewhat different:

Ibsen's profound source of strength is his insistence, his utter conviction, that he is going to say what he has to say, and the audience, by God, is going to listen. ...Every Ibsen play begins with the unwritten words: 'Now listen here!' And these words have shown me a path through the wall of 'entertainment', a path that leads beyond the formulas and dried-up precepts, the pretense and the fraud, of the business of stage. Whatever else Ibsen has to teach, this is his first and greatest contribution.³

The play must, in other words, make a statement of significance, and therein lies the relevance of the playwright to society.

² Arthur Miller, "On Social Plays", Introduction to A View from the Bridge; reprinted in John D. Hurrell, Two Modern American Tragedies, p. 44

³ Introduction to Miller's adaptation of An Enemy of the People, p.

Admittedly, Miller is not the first American playwright who has regarded questions of social right and wrong as a legitimate premise of the theatre. "Social drama" has been known to the American playgoers since Royal Tyler introduced to them the stage-Yankee in the person of Jonathan, a New England farmer of little sophistication but considerable wisdom, even "education", in his highly successful comedy, The Contrast (first produced in 1787 and published in 1790). The Prologue to Tyler's play announces that

Our author pictures not from foreign climes
The fashions, and follies of the times
But has confin'd the subject of his work
To gay scenes, the circles of New-York.⁴

Although early American dramatists dealt with contemporary social problems in a comic vein, they seldom missed the opportunity to broach delicate subjects and popular notions. Tyler's play, ostensibly a study in contrast between homespun merit and imported affectation, is really a plea for sincerity and a good-humoured condemnation of the hypocrisy in his very own "gay scenes - the circles of New-York." Through a skilful coalescence of opposite traits in the same character, the playwright fearlessly exposes the very ideology from which exemplary drama derives its inspiration - namely Puritanism. Jonathan whom Jessamy has been trying to "educate" in some of the city vices startles every one with not only the information that he has made a visit to the playhouse but that his reactions have been far different from what

4 In Arthur H. Quinn, ed., Representative American Plays, p.48

might have been expected of a Puritan like him.

JENNY: ...Well -

JONATHAN: So I went right in, and they showed me away, clean up to the garret, just like a meeting-house gallery. And so I saw a power of topping folks, all sitting round in little cabins, "just like father's corn-cribs;" and then there was such a squeaking with the fiddles, and such a tarnal blaze with the lights, my head was nearly turned. At last the people that sat near me set up such a hissing - hiss - like so many mad cats; and then they went thump, thump, thump, like our peleg threshing wheat, and stamp away, just like the nation; and called out for one Mr. Longolee - I suppose he helps act the tricks.

JENNY: Well and what did you do all this time?

JONATHAN: Gor, I - I liked the fun, and so I thumt away, and hiss'd as lustily as the best of 'em. One sailor-looking man that sat by me, seeing me stamp, and knowing I was a cute fellow, because I could make a roaring noise, clapt me on the shoulder and said, "You are a d--d hearty cock, smite my timbers!" I told him so I was, but I thought he need not swear so, and make use of such naughty words.

JENNY: The savage! - Well, and did you see the man with his tricks?....but did you see the family?

JONATHAN: Yes, swamp it; I see'd the family.

JENNY: Well, and how did you like them?

JONATHAN: Why I vow, they were pretty much like other families; -there was a poor, good-natured curse of a husband, and a sad rantipole of a wife.

JENNY: But did you see no other folks?

JONATHAN: Yes. There was one youngster; they called him Mr. Joseph; ~~he~~ talked as sober and as pious as a minister; but like some ministers that I know, he was a sly tike in his heart for all that. He was going to ask a young woman to spark it with him, and - Lord have mercy on my soul! - she was another man's wife.⁵

This type of social satire engaged the minds of a few American playwrights for the next one hundred years. A desire to instruct as

5 Ibid., pp. 64b-65a

amuse prompted William Dunlap, one of the most significant innovators in the early American theatre, to re-create in *Tears and Smiles* (1808) his version of The Contrast. The production, in 1845, of Anna Cora Mowatt's Fashion (published in London, 1850) appears to have accelerated the growth of this genre and inspired a succession of plays vigorously attacking the attitudes of those whose sole aim in life is a secure position without any responsibility to social values. To some extent these playwrights represent an artistic reaction to the almost epidemic tendency among the rest of their colleagues to seek dramatic themes in foreign - often never-never lands and societies. Unlike the writers of romantic tragedy - The Prince of Parthia onward - or of comedy of English social life whose titles and labels provided the playwright with a convenient substitute for characterisation, these writers of native comedy wrote about a real society - the one they were part of; they brought actual experience to bear upon their work; and chose to establish their characters in terms of the human experience their countrymen shared rather than of a hierarchy they had left behind. But essentially it was a more positive choice than simply an artistic reaction. It was dictated by a genuine desire among a few dramatists to right certain social wrongs. Although this endowed the plays with a marked contemporary relevance, even vitality, in volume they remained but a handful. While they did prepare the American audiences for at least a mixture of entertainment and social criticism on the stage, their success as social plays was limited by the question-

able distinctions they made between social right and wrong. For while they attacked or satirised one set of false values – those of the deviator from the social norm – they often accepted, and tried to impose equally arbitrary standards – those of society – upon the individual. At best they may be regarded as having rendered one service to the American theatre – of paving the way, partially at least, for the much more serious drama of social criticism that was to emerge in the twentieth century. As a direct source of inspiration to a modern playwright their value is negligible. Miller's opinion, for instance, is:

We had a very slight indigenous American drama until the first world war. By that I mean that a direct reflection of American manners, American life, barely existed on the stage. Life was life and the theatre was the theatre.⁶

To determine whether the post-1918 drama contributed materially to Miller's social consciousness, or to his emergence as a playwright, it is necessary to bring this already tedious chronicle up to date, and to recount, in particular, the growth of the social tradition in the American theatre between the wars. The disillusionment of the first war fostered a negative, critical, often cynical attitude among the playwrights, who began by debunking the pretensions and ideals of middle class culture. Social, ethical, religious and political problems, all drew dramatic comment. Besides liberalising morals, the playwrights indulged in an attack on patriotism and hundred per cent Americanism.

⁶ "The Schizophrenia of the American Mind" [an interview reported by Henry Brandon], The Sunday Times (Magazine Section), March 20, 1960.

Yet a prevailing aversion to propaganda kept them confined to a negative position. With the Nazi aggression in Europe, However, they were forced to adopt a much more positive attitude in defending democracy, even war. In the same period, the business depression also converted many of them to the Soviet slogan of "Drama as a weapon". The development may thus be described as from disillusion to reform, and reform to propaganda. A body of drama grew up in the 1930's which claimed little adherence to any artistic credo, and interested itself almost exclusively in social, political and economic problems of the time. A contemporary account throws some light on the ideals of this "new" theatre. Hallie Flanagan wrote in Theatre Arts that there were "only two theatres in the country...that are clear as to aim: one is the commercial theatre which wants to make more money; the other is the worker's theatre which wants to make a new social order."⁷

Worker's Theatre, the official organ of this school, urged that the workers will have to write their own plays - and this need not be difficult since "playwriting can be learnt like any other trade."⁸

The sole criteria of dramatic achievement, it maintained, were: "Does the play purporting to be on some theme of social justice state its problem clearly, develop it fearlessly, and send the audience out to do something about the problem?"⁹

7 "A Theatre is Born", Theatre Arts, XV (November, 1931), 915

8 Quoted in ibid., 913

9 Ibid., 912

Miss Flanagan's own energies were channelled in the Federal Theatre Project, a vast enterprise providing low-priced national theatre. It comprised several regional playhouses, and registered the co-operation of playwrights like Elmer Rice, Sidney Howard and Paul Green. One of its most ingenious contributions was the "Living Newspaper", a form derived from such diverse sources as the commedia dell'arte, Mei Lanfang, Aristophanes, and the cinema, and incorporating all the vital machinery of a city newspaper - editors, reporters, and research teams. The resulting form, which had no plot in the ordinary sense, was intended to dramatise a current problem, to trace its historical origins, and devise adequate solutions.

If this were the American equivalent of Ibsen's "Now listen here!" and if Arthur Miller's social drama went no further than this, Miller might well deserve the strictures that his plays are no more than propaganda. But, as John Gassner points out, the Worker's Theatre movement itself had, by 1933, been

penetrated by more expert and less militant members... Recognising the fact that it was now an association of theatre people united only by an aversion to fascism, by sympathy with the underdog, or simply by a desire to create a vital stage, the movement renamed itself the New Theatre League. In accordance with the new policy, the New Theatre Magazine announced an annual award for the best play of 'social significance', promising to produce it at benefit nights with the assistance of sympathetic acting groups.¹⁰

10 Introduction to Twenty Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre, p. x

Among the playwrights whom the contests discovered - or sustained - were Clifford Odets (Waiting for Lefty, 1935), Paul Green (Hymn to the Rising Sun, 1936), and Irwin Shaw (Bury the Dead, 1936).

The "sympathetic acting group" that performed Odets' one-acter was the Group Theatre to which Odets himself had belonged as an actor. It had evolved, about 1929, out of the Theatre Guild of New York, and comprised a number of experienced actors and three able directors - Cheryl Crawford, Lee Strasberg, and Harold Clurman - "all inspired by the ideal of a collective theatre that would perfect ensemble playing and would give itself wholly to the badly shattered world beyond the footlights."¹¹ During the one decade of its bumpy existence, the Group produced some of the plays of Sidney Kingsley, Paul Green, Irwin Shaw, beside the first play of Saroyan, and almost all of Odets' work.

Even the Group Theatre, at its inception, had declared: "A good play for us is not one which measures up to some literary standard of 'art' or 'beauty', but one which is the image or symbol of the living problems of our times."¹² These might well have been the words of a spokesman of the Worker's Theatre, but Clurman was quick to point out that what the statement meant was that "unless a playwright is deeply concerned with the life of his own time, he cannot be an artist."¹³

¹¹ Ibid., p. ix

¹² "Mixed Ideals in the American Theatre", Theatre Arts, XVI (April, 1932), 335

¹³ "An Answer from the Group Theatre", Theatre Arts, XVI (June, 1932), 507

Here we are back to Miller's premise about the role of the playwright in society. In the essay "On Social Plays", he expressed the belief that the playwright, along with the other artists, has a social responsibility to discharge, a contribution to make in the building of the ideal social order: "Time is moving," he said, "there is a world to make, a civilization to create that will move toward the only goal the humanistic, democratic mind can ever accept with honor."¹⁴ In fairness to American drama of the 'thirties, it must then be said, regardless of its present-day reputation, that it represents a vital phase in the development of the tradition of social drama which had a modest beginning towards the end of the eighteenth century, and that Arthur Miller is an heir, if also a rebel, to this tradition. He shared with playwrights of the decade not only the economic milieu of the depression, but certain basic attitudes to the theatre. Although he has said, "I wrote my first play in the ten days of spring vacation. I had seen one play in my life and read the tragedies of Shakespeare,"¹⁵ it must be remembered that by the mid-thirties he was not only pursuing a university course in playwriting, but his undergraduate work was bringing him recognition - a situation in which a young dramatist can no longer remain indifferent to what is happening in the contemporary theatre. Miller's direct association with the theatrical nuclei of the

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¹⁵ In Stanley Kunitz, ed., Twentieth Century Authors, p. 669

period was, of course, limited to a brief membership (after he had graduated at Michigan in 1938) of the Federal Theatre for which he wrote one play - and before even that could be produced, lack of financial support brought about the closure of the project. But he did make the acquaintance of the Group Theatre through its productions, and regarded it as an enormous intellectual force in the country, which manifested its social awareness as well as its artistic acumen in practical terms of the stage. "The Group," said Miller at a symposium in London, "gave birth to a minute group of people whose influence, I think, has been fabulous."¹⁶ Some months later, in the Introduction to his Collected Plays (1958), he paid tribute to the inspiration he himself had received from the Group's performances at a time when he was at a loss to "finish" any of his "desk-drawer plays".

The sole sense of connection with theater came when I saw the productions of the Group Theatre. It was not only the brilliance of ensemble acting, which in my opinion has never since been equaled in America, but the air of union created between the actors and the audience.¹⁷

To Miller, this sense of community is important not only between actor and audience, but equally between playwright and players, between playwright and playgoers, and - above all - in any dramatic treatment of either, between the individual and society. For him the relationship between the two is not of a unit and the aggregate, but of each being a

¹⁶ "Cause Without Rebel", Encore, June-July, 1957. [No pagination]

¹⁷ Collected Plays, p. 16. In all subsequent references the title is abbreviated as C.P.

part of the same live process. Miller believes that to establish this relationship is vital to the success of any drama, and he argues that Greek drama succeeded because

...the individual was at one with society; his conflicts with it were...like family conflicts the opposing sides of which nevertheless shared a mutuality of feeling and responsibility.¹⁸

The obvious questions that arise are: Has there been such a mutuality of feeling and responsibility between the individual and society in Miller's own time? In classical Greek society he visualises the individual as considering himself a part of an all-important polis with a strong sense of identity with it. Does the American citizen exhibit such a relationship with American society? Or does Miller create a society in his plays wherein the characters share this sense of identity with it? If so, what are his characters' conflicts with society? Are they, in fact, "like family conflicts"? Above all, are they relevant to the actual world we live in today?

Miller grew up during the years of the Depression, and the impact on him of the social background of the period has been very considerable indeed. He had a full measure of his share of the economic experience:

I happened to have withdrawn my twelve dollars to buy a racing bike a friend of mine was bored with, and the next day the Bank of the United States closed. I rode by and saw the crowds of people standing at the brass gates. Their money was inside! And they couldn't get it. As for me, I felt I had the thing licked.

But about a week later I went into the house to get

18 "On Social Plays", p.

a glass of milk and when I came out my bike was gone.¹⁹

As Dennis Welland points out, the Depression gave Miller "his compassionate understanding of the insecurity of man in modern industrial civilisation, his deep-rooted belief in social responsibility, and ...moral earnestness,"²⁰ but the very absence of these elements in the period must have rendered it unfit for direct representation in drama where the aim was to achieve a community of feeling between self and society. It is difficult to determine how far Depression-ridden America features in Miller's early work. For, although he started writing plays way back in the mid-thirties, the earliest work he included in his Collected Plays was All My Sons (1947). The manuscripts of at least four of his full-length plays dating to the period²¹(which between themselves won him three playwriting awards) are held by the New York City Public Library and the University of Michigan Library, but being his own greatest critic, Miller is very reluctant to make these available for critical study. In reply to my request for access to these works, he wrote:

...The plays you mention are [sic] beginner's works which I would rather leave in obscurity. In fact, they are held by the University only because I won prizes

19 "The Shadows of the Gods", Harper's Magazine, August 1958, 36

20 Honors at Dawn (1936): Avery Hopwood award by Univ. of Michigan, 1936
No Villain (1937): Avery Hopwood award, 1937
The Grass Still Grows (1936): Theatre Guild national award, 1938
They, Too, Arise (1938)

21 Dennis Welland, Arthur Miller [subsequent references are to the critic's name only], pp. 6-7.

with them as an undergraduate, and I would prefer that they be left only for the record.²²

His first completed work since these undergraduate exercises was The Man Who Had All the Luck (1944), a play that lacked all the luck and had to be taken off Broadway on the fourth night. Miller decided to withdraw it from the reading public as well, and it is now practically out of print.²³ The play is based upon the factual story "of a young-man in a midwestern town who had earned the love and respect of his town and great personal prosperity as well, and who, suddenly and for no known reason, took to suspecting everyone of wanting to rob him, and within a year of his obsession's onset had taken his own life."²⁴ The plot of the play may be briefly outlined as follows. Pat Beeves, a jealous and protective father, forces his son Amos into training as a baseball pitcher and into mediocrity. On the other hand, an orphan, David Frieber (of the printed text or David Beeves, the ignored younger son of Pat, according to the Broadway version), an unskilled motor mechanic, thrives in both business and married life, while people all around him are, like Amos, frustrated failures. He attributes his own success to no ability but to luck, which is indeed the town's view of him. He grows neurotic worrying about it, and in his obsession, almost

22 Letter dated Roxbury, Conn., May 27, 1966

23 Probably the only copy of the text in this country is on the microfilm from E. Seaver, ed., Cross-Section, 1944, in the possession of Professor Dennis Welland, Department of American Studies, University of Manchester.

24 C.P., Introduction, p. 14

brings disaster upon himself until his wife and his immigrant assistant Gus force upon him the understanding that "he is the boss of his life."

Welland suggests that the play is a "hangover from the thirties"²⁵ and the widespread frustration among all but one of the characters may well seem to justify that. But the underlying question in the play is: what is success to be attributed to? The individual's free will, the society, or some natural or supernatural determinist force? Inasmuch as the ultimate answer of the events seems to be — "No one but the individual!", it is hard to accept that Miller, whose personal reactions to the Depression have been noted above, would have precluded the role of historical and social forces if he had actually meant to set the play against the background of the Depression. In any case, there is hardly a word or gesture in the speeches of the characters to suggest any allusion to the period, and from this point of view, it is even more difficult to put a date to this play than to any other of Miller's.

The only Miller play actually laid in the Depression is the one-acter, A Memory of Two Mondays (1955). It depicts the robot-like existence of a group of people in an auto-parts warehouse. One of the characters, the old Gus (who suggests some comparison with his namesake in The Man Who Had All the Luck) is squashed between the monotony of

²⁵ Welland, p. 30

of his job and the whoring-dining-wining weekend carousels while his wife is dying. The young Bert, working to save up for a course at the college and reading War and Peace on the subway home, is unmistakably a portrait of young Miller himself (possibly with his Brothers Karamazov) before he went to Michigan, and Miller's unusual fondness for this almost unsuccessful play is obvious from the statement:

"Nothing in this book [Collected Plays] was written with greater love, and for myself I love nothing printed here better."²⁶ It is admittedly a play about that period of shatteringly unforgettable experiences of Miller's youth. The New York Times, carrying headlines about Hitler and Roosevelt, features repeatedly in it, and Sheila Huftel describes it as "a documentary play".²⁷ But the social question touched upon in the play - namely the impersonality of group relations in an industrial society - is far from confined to the period of the Depression. It was as live and threatening in the 'fifties when the play was written, and if anything has grown in magnitude since. One has only to compare Two Mondays with a play like Odets' Waiting for Lefty to realise the lyricism of one and the militancy of the other. Here there is no soapbox oratory, no black and white facets to the problem. The capitalists, Ray and Eagle, are depicted as indifferent at worst, though more generally they are human. The triumph of the will rather than social reform preoccupies the essential theme of the play when "from this endless,

²⁶ C.P., Introduction, p. 49

²⁷ Sheila Huftel, Arthur Miller, p. 152 [Subsequently referred to as Huftel]

timeless, will-less environment, a boy emerges who will not accept its defeat or its mood as final."²⁸

The other major event of Miller's lifetime, the Second World War, occupies as little of his work as does the Depression, although All My Sons was variously described as a play "about war profiteering",²⁹ or "about the war's aftermath",³⁰ or as "a study of postwar adjustments".³¹ In it, Joe Keller, a small manufacturer, has acquiesced in supplying the U.S. Air Force with cracked cylinder-heads for aeroplane engines during the war, and thus caused the death of twenty-one American pilots. His elder son, Larry (also a pilot) is believed to have died in a crash in battle. However, Joe has managed to have his partner, Steve, take the punishment for the crime. Another punishment inflicted upon Steve's family is that his daughter Ann has lost a fiancé in Larry. She now has a proposal from his younger brother, Chris, who has safely returned from the war, but is somewhat ashamed of his intention to marry his dead brother's sweetheart. When, on top of his own uneasiness, Chris becomes aware of his father's crime, he cannot reconcile to his existence, and decides to leave both Ann and home. At this moment of crisis, Joe is made to face his guilt, and resolves the impasse by shooting himself.

The play, however, is not a tragedy of the twenty-one pilots, nor

²⁸ C.P., Introduction, p. 49

²⁹

³⁰ Life, XXII (March 10, 1947), 71-74

³¹ Newsweek, XXIX (February 10, 1947), 85

is Joe's death his punishment for his war profiteering. The war is no more than an objective correlative, a frame of reference and not the dramatic material, or the fulcrum of the balance of the play. Larry died in the war. His death is a fact lying buried in the unconscious mind of his mother. Chris must not marry Ann lest the dormant truth should pierce out through Kate's consciousness and stab at Joe's life. But the drama is about the recognition or denial of certain human relationships, and not about cracked cylinder-heads.

Miller's other play "about the war", Incident at Vicky (1965), is again concerned with far deeper and more fundamental human questions than the disposal of the Jews in the Second War. The Crucible (1953) has as little to do with McCarthyism in mid-twentieth century America as Hamlet with century Denmark. In short, Miller's social drama deserves neither credit nor censure for topicality, sociology, militancy, or even radicalism. Society does not appear in his plays as a body of economic or political statistics, and the dramatic resolutions do not represent any straightforward cures for specific social ills. This is Miller's first major departure from the tradition of social drama as he inherited it in the nineteen-thirties. The distinguishing feature of his work is a balance between, or rather a fusion of the sociological and the psychological, resulting in a broader and more complex social vision than a straight propagandist play can embody. The effects of political events, economic crises, and social forces, are much too intricately interwoven into the pattern of individual psychological responses

of his characters. Neither side exists as a separate entity. Arising like sparks out of this interaction, social and personal values shed light upon each other and provide both playwright and audience with a basis for moral judgment.

Joe Keller and Society, or Willy Loman and Society, are not portrayed as in a combat, or even in a debate. Joe, for instance, has committed a crime against society, but he is also a product of society. He was "put out" when he was ten years old [C.P., p. 120], and had to go to work at that early age. The best education he could get was his time at the night school [C.P., p. 96]. His hardwork ensured small progress for him in a growingly specialised society. The whole world around his little existence was a business world with something like General Motors at its Utopian top [C.P., p. 109]. The little man could never hope for an equal treatment with the big one: "a little man makes a mistake and they hang him by the thumbs; the big ones become ambassadors." [C.P., p.109]. One cannot completely discredit his resentment -

Did they ship a gun or a truck outa Detroit before they
got their price? It's dollars and cents, nickles and
dimes; war and peace.. What's clean? [C.P., p. 125]

In this society, even Chris, the idealist, feels that

...if I have to grub for money all day at least at evening
I want it beautiful. I want a family, I want some kids, I
want to build something I can give myself to. [C.P., p. 69]

One of his protestations of love for Ann is: "I'm going to make a fortune for you." [C.P., p. 86].

Jim Bayliss, the character who comes nearest to Chris in idealism,

married a nurse who could see him through medical school. He felt he owed it to her to set up a profitable medical practice rather than pursue his research. Having no love of money for its own sake - at times positively detesting it, in fact [C.P., p.117] - he is no more prepared to take a "civics-textbook" view of the medical profession. "I would like to help humanity," he says, "on a Warner Brothers salary," [C.P., p. 6] when Frank tells him about the devoted doctor in the film he has recently seen. Any slight danger that there may be of a relapse into the ideals of his younger days is taken care of by his wife, who safeguards him against the infectious idealism of Chris. She begs a favour of Ann:

When you take up housekeeping, try to find a place away from here...Chris wants people to do better than it is possible to be...My husband has a family, dear. Every time he has a session with Chris he feels as though he's compromising by not giving up everything for research. As though Chris or anybody else isn't compromising.
[C.P., p. 93]

Jim is really not in need of this protection. He knows too well that even Chris will not need it long.

Oh, no, he'll come back. We all come back, Kate. These private little revolutions always die. The compromise is always made... [C.P., p. 118]

And Chris does come back, and the compromise is made:

CHRIS: I'm going away. There are a couple of firms in Cleveland, I think I can get a place... To Ann alone:
I know what you're thinking. It's true. I'm yellow.
I was made yellow in this house because I suspected my father and did nothing about it. [C.P., p.123]

Who did? To the children of the neighbourhood, Joe is - at worst - a

genial old rogue who plays policeman-and-prison games with them and is "bad" enough to encourage them to learn "dirty words" [C.P., p. 65]. Their parents are no different.

ANN: The last thing I remember on this block was one word - "Murderers!" Remember that, Kate? - Mrs Hammond standing in front of our house and yelling that word? She's still around, I suppose.

But her fears are hardly shared by anyone, for

MOTHER: They're all still around.
[And] KELLER: ...Every Saturday night the whole gang is playing poker in this arbor. All the ones who yelled murderers taking my money now. [C.P., p. 80]

Ann knows fully well what Joe did - that not only did he ship out defective machinery to the Air Force, and sent young Americans to their graves, but made her father take the rap for it, and - above all - forced his own son, the person dearest to Ann, into what can only be described as a suicide. But even she has too much "charity" to judge him for his act.

The neighbourhood represents a pluralistic, mechanised, urban society where we hear children talk about a "Thirtieth Street"; Lydia Lubey, who is worried about her electric gadgets, is thankful that she married the handyman Frank (who can mend anything from an electric toaster to a malt mixer) while George, whom she loved, "was getting mad about fascism"; George telephones the Kellers from seven hundred miles [C.P., p.86], but arrives in the afternoon of the same day; Joe himself manufactured cylinder heads for a "P-40" 'plane. The excessive specialisation and competition have made it a world of enormous personal insecurity. Chris begs of

Sue:

Susie, do me a favor, heh? Go up to mother and see if you can calm her. She's all worked up.
 SUE, going to porch: Oh, yeah, she's psychic.
 CHRIS: Maybe there's something in the medicine chest.
 SUE: I'll give her one of everything. [C.P., p.94]

But the irony ceases to be comic when one realises that only a moment ago Sue has been asking a similar "favor" of Ann. The neighbourhood is not merely a microcosm of the American - or any industrial and competitive - society, but it also has something of the intimacy of a family, a large family, a tribe, or a polis perhaps - as Miller would have it. Its members basically share its ideals and do not overstep its "ethical" bounds. Their moral indifference manifests itself, as has been pointed out earlier, as a kind of neighbourly charity. Joe Keller is, in many ways, just another member of the polis, but like every other member, he finds it difficult, if not impossible, to identify himself with it "except in the form of a truce with it" [C.P., Introduction, p.]. Like the rest of them, he has sought refuge from psychological insecurity in the American shrine of the family. He wants no more from life than do the others. A few apparently vulgar remarks he makes at the opening of the play show how little, in fact, he wants.

KELLER: ...I don't read the news part [of the paper] any more. It's more interesting in the wants ads.
 FRANK: Why, you trying to buy something?
 KELLER: No, I'm just interested. To see what people want y'know. For instance, here's a guy looking for two Newfoundland dogs. Now what's he want with two Newfoundland dogs? ...Here's another one. Wanted - old dictionaries. High prices paid. Now what's a man want with an old dictionary?

19 6011

FRANK: Why not? Probably a book collector.

KELLER: You mean he'll make a living out of that?
[C.P., p. 60].

Here, however, the Greek ideal of the identity of "feeling and responsibility" clearly breaks down between Joe and his polis. Book collecting and Newfoundland dogs may be no more than wholly unadmirable symbols of a bourgeois culture, but Keller's disinterest in the news of the world beyond his "forty-foot front", in everything in fact that cannot provide a "living", and his complacency to sit back and be amused by the needs of others once his "living" has been secured, are indications of the degree to which his passion for the welfare of his family has blinded him to the welfare of the larger human family.

Joe's general ignorance well merits Chris's description of him as "George Bernard Shaw as an elephant" [C.P., p. 86]. Witness his bafflement at why a malt mixer would not do just as well as a toaster for the same job [C.P., p. 64], or at the revelation that several new books are published every week [C.P., p. 64]. His vulgarity and lack of imagination are obvious from his remarks about Ann, in whom he finds nothing better worth praising than her legs [C.P., p. 75], or in his failure to devise a more suggestive password than "Mum" for his policeman games [CP, p 66]. He can burst into downright idiocy at times as, for instance, when he learns about George's intended visit.

Well, nobody told me it was Labor Day...Where's the hot dogs? ...Well as long as I know it's Labor Day from now on, I'll wear a bell around my neck... [C.P., p. 86]

One really begins to wonder whether beneath this stalking horse of folly

there isn't some of the cleverness of a Shakespearean fool, or in his own context, the practicality that his neighbours share with him to one degree or another.

But Joe Keller is certainly no villain in the conventional sense. There is no sign of actual brutality or cruelty in his character, and his claim, "I never believed in crucifying people," [C.P., p. 81] may well be justified to a point. A good householder, a loving husband and father - these are some of his cherished values, but he thinks they justify any amount of practicality in his social behaviour. He is sure he has had the punishment passed on to his partner because he could not afford to deprive his own family of their breadwinner. He boasts of "guts" in having braved the neighbours after his trial. [C.P., p. 80]. Even they give him credit for "smartness", and he admits, "I ignore what I gotta ignore," [C.P., p.68], but he does so not because he is a villain, but because

Joe Keller's trouble ...is not that he cannot tell right from wrong but that his cast of mind cannot admit that he, personally, has any viable connection with his world, his universé. [C.P., Introduction, p. 19]

But it seems, in the context of the action of the play, the real trouble with Joe is that eventually he ceases to see even his connection with the members of the very family for whose sake he is prepared to make all possible compromises with the world. His practicality begins to operate as much upon the family as upon society. For example, he opposes Chris's intention to marry Ann on the plea that it would necessitate revealing

the truth about Larry being dead, to Kate.

KELLER: I don't see why it has to be Annie.

CHRIS: Because it is.

KELLER: I - I'm - She thinks he's coming back. You marry that girl and you are pronouncing him dead. Now what's going to happen to mother? Do you know? I don't!

[C.P., p. 68]

His ostensible concern for his wife's happiness is really much more of a concern for his own image as father and husband, because he knows that Kate knows that if Larry is dead, then his father killed him. [CP, p.114] On the other hand, when he is overwhelmed by the much more fearful prospect of George bringing down legal action upon him, he quickly changes his cards, and readily agrees to consummate the marriage in the hope that the marital alliance will avert any further hostility between the families. "Look, Chris," he cries in nervous excitement, "I'll go to work on mother for you. We'll get her so drunk tonight we'll all get married! ...There's gonna be a wedding, kid, like there never was seen! Champagne, tuxedos!" [C.P., p. 88]. Again, in his zest for the prosperity of his son, he outrages the latter's idealism to such an extent as to alienate him. Chris is basically an affectionate son, almost idolatrous of his father.

CHRIS: Drink your tea, Cassanova. (He turns to Ann): Isn't he a great guy?

ANN: You're the only one I know who loves his parents.
[C.P., p. 83]

Chris knows (or believes) him to be an ignoramus and is prepared to make several concessions on that account, but the father tries to cage the son's personality behind golden bars, and this sows the seed of the dramatic conflict. The militant idealist that Chris is, soaked in ideas of patriot-

ism and comradeship, he is not prepared to accept the gains of business in which mercenary fathers have flourished while youthful sons laid down their lives on the warfront:

[On returning from the war] I went to work with Dad, and that ratrace again. I felt - what you said - ashamed somehow. Because nobody was changed at all. It seemed to make suckers out of a lot of guys. I felt wrong to be alive, to open the bank-book, to drive the new car, to see the new refrigerator. I mean you can take those things out of a war, but when you drive that car you've got to know it came out of the love a man may have for a man, you've got to be a little better because of that. Otherwise what you have is really loot, and there's blood on it. I didn't want to take any of it. And I guess that included you [Ann].

[C.P., p. 85]

Joe, on his part, considers a son no more than a branch of the paternal tree which must draw its sustenance and strength from the main trunk, and must not question it.

Because he is my son. Because I'm his father and he's my son... Nothin's bigger than that, and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head.

[C.P., p. 120]

In seeking to fulfil his own concept of a good father, he fails to see any alternative values, not even those to which his sons are as deeply committed as he is to his. He attempts to infuse Chris with his own ideology: "Chris, a man can't be a Jesus in this world," [C.P., p.125], he says, and implores him to own his desserts: "it's good money, there's nothing wrong with that money." [C.P., p.87]. He even offers to dissociate his own name from the business and let Chris write his happiness anew on a clean slate if only he would accept the little fortune he has made for him:

I want a clean start for you, Chris. I want a new sign over the plant - Christopher Keller, Incorporated... I'll build you a house, stone, with a driveway from the road. I want you to spread out, Chris, I want you to use what I made for you... I mean with joy, Chris, without shame, with joy. [C.P., p. 87]

It is his last desperate effort to preserve his misinformed vision, and it fails. However, the point is, his commitment to a false ideal has unmistakably underlined one thing all along: his failure to see his proper connection with his polis. The recognition does not come even when Chris turns down all his offers and insists that he own his crime and embrace its punishment.

KELLER: He would forgive me! For what?

MOTHER: Joe, you know what I mean.

KELLER: I don't know what you mean! You wanted money, so I made money. What must I be forgiven?

[C.P., p.120]

It comes when Larry's letter to Ann is read out [C.P., pp. 125-26], wherein he explained how, unable to live with the knowledge of his father's act, he had decided to take his own life. And it comes in stages. First, Joe recognises his moral responsibility for Larry's death, and through it, he realises how his intense devotion to the family "ideal" had obscured his vision of his son's ideals. He sees for the first time the much wider fact of human connection. It is too late for action: he does put the promised bullet through his head, but that cannot make heroes of him and the twenty-one dead pilots. The tragedy lies in his statement —

I think to him [Larry] they were all my sons. And I guess they were, I guess they were.

[C.P., p. 126]

— a personal recognition, arrived at in a personalised context, but thereby made universal. Unlike social drama of the 'thirties, the social significance as well as the tragedy of All My Sons derives, not from an indictment of either the false polis or the doubly false individual, but rather from the compassion with which Joe Keller as a human being is led along the tortuous path of self-knowledge and a sharper vision of his position in relation to his world.

Self-knowledge is indeed the goal, and compassion the dominant feature of the treatment of the central character in Miller's next (and perhaps greatest) play, Death of a Salesman: Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem (1949). Its victim-hero, Willy Loman, a travelling salesman for a New York firm, has "drummed merchandise" for thirty-four years (according to himself, or thirty-six according to his wife, Linda) in a number of American states, but now past sixty years of age, he has been robbed of his salary and reduced to "straight commission". He has been frustrated in his own "success dream", his belief that a smile on the face, a shine on the shoes, a casual manner and a glib tongue can ensure personal popularity and, therefore, business and social advancement. However, he has never done well in business or society, and particularly when we meet him, he is helplessly struggling to pay off a mortgage on his house, instalments on his refrigerator, repair bills for his car...and to sustain his wife's illusion that he can still support the family, he is forced to "borrow" - more than he earns - from a neighbour.

His other major disappointment in life has been his much-beloved elder son, Biff, who showed some promise as a football hero at school, but having found his father-idol to be a "fake" (when he discovered Willy half-dressed and locked up in a hotel room with a strange woman), Biff never fulfilled any of the promises of his youth, and became, instead, "a philanderer and a thief". At the opening of the play, Willy has been trying to commit suicide, and Biff has returned home from his wanderings "in the west" (and through prison). Confident of their sociable qualities, the family once again resolve to save themselves from ruin. Willy would tell his boss, Howard, to put him on a local job in New York; Biff, now thirty-five, will get a former employer of his to finance a business for him and his younger brother, Happy; in the evening, the "boys" would celebrate their own and their father's success by "blowing him up to a great dinner" at a restaurant. But, in the next twenty-four hours, everything goes wrong: Willy loses even his travelling job; and Biff brings home no capital for his business. The dinner spells disaster, and the two sons go away with two girls, leaving the father helplessly crawling off a washroom floor in the restaurant. Home again, however, Willy discovers that Biff only wanted to shatter the "phony" dream that Willy is equally determined to sustain, but nonetheless he did love him now as in his youth. To provide Biff a fresh start, Willy decides to salvage his insurance policy by killing himself.

As the play progresses, and scene after scene reveals Willy's past, marked similarities become apparent between his career and Joe Keller's.

To use an ironic expression, Willy is - like Joe - a "self-made" man. When he was a child his father "would toss the family into a wagon, and then drive the team right across the country..." [C.P., p. 157]. There could have been little chance of a proper schooling for Willy, and later years hardly provided anything like an education. He reads newspaper advertisements with no less than Joe's sense of wonder, and believes every word of them. [C.P., p. 148]. And then, "Dad left [for Alaska in search of gold] when I was such a baby and...I still feel kind of temporary about myself." [C.P., p. 159]. In the hope of finding some "permanence" - or "comradeship" or "personality", as he calls it [C.P., p 180] - he took to selling, but lacking any training or specialisation in an age of specialisation, and despite the fact that he has been "at it ten, twelve hours a day" [C.P., p. 140], he has growingly become a misfit in a profession to which he has given his entire working career. The profession has no security against old age, and Willy is reduced to one of the many ciphers of the urban social machine. Everything about him speaks of his insignificance: his name Lo-man is no accident; and even Miller's set design for the play seems to confirm it. Willy's three-room mortgaged Brooklyn house is embedded amidst the claustrophobic towers of apartment buildings: the house is skeletal whereas the skyscrapers are solid concrete. Willy's environment seems to do just one thing to him - to dwarf his stature as a human being.

Such evidence in the play has led critics to the view that Death of a Salesman is just another of the leftist plays that stormed the stage

in the 1930's. Eleanor Clark's comment is characteristic of this view:

...it is, of course, the capitalistic system that has done Willy in; the scene in which he is brutally fired after some forty [sic] years with the firm comes straight from the party line literature of the 'thirties, and the idea emerges lucidly enough through all the confused motivations of the play that it is our particular form of money economy that has bred the absurdly false ideas of both father and sons.³²

Clark's interpretation of Miller's intentions and approach to playwriting seems to be no more sound than her grasp of the facts of the play. Willy never worked for Howard's firm for "forty" years: his own version suggests 34 years [C.P., p. 181]. (Even Linda, who has a genius for exaggerating Willy's dues puts it at 36 [CP, p.163]). At any rate, a "party-line" approach would lay a heavier burden of guilt on the "capitalistic" characters in the play: In Salesman there hardly are any such characters. Welland³³ has already pointed out that Howard does not at all fit into any preconceptions of a capitalist tycoon, and his firing of Willy is by no means "brutal" which, for instance, Newman's dismissal is in Miller's own novel, Focus. Howard is, as Welland suggests, another little man like Willy; and Charley, who with his cold, unsentimental rationality comes nearest to the idea of the big businessman, is too decent, benign and helpful to represent any evil "system": by Willy's own account, Charley is the "only friend" he has.

However, one might argue that the capitalist system need not necessari-

32 "Old Glamour, New Gloom", Partisan Review, XVI (June, 1949), 633

33 Welland, pp. 54-56

ly be manifested in vicious business magnates, and two figures in the play (who, ironically, are the persons most concerned about Willy's welfare) do, indeed, symbolise negative social values of which Willy is a victim. First, there is the recurring motif of Ben, Willy's elder brother, who is an airy and insubstantial "embodiment" of the insubstantial American myth of rags-to-riches success, which Willy shares in American literature with the Gatsbys and the Babbits. Ben makes his appearances, like Macbeth's witches, when Willy is in most "danger" of waking up from this dream, and reminds him:

William, when I walked into the jungle I was seventeen.
When I walked out I was twenty-one. And, by God, I was
rich. [C.P., p. 159]

Then there is the much more immediate presence of Linda, the loyal, suffering, loving, respectful wife, in whom Willy encounters another aspect of the American dream - i.e. material security as the highest goal in life. She is the one person who understands him least. Unwittingly and paradoxically, she is one of the most destructive forces in his life. She is the one who helps him all along to escape reality. She convinces him that he is a "well-liked" Dave Singleman. Whenever he begins to recognise the fact of his mediocrity - "I don't know the reason for it, but they just pass by me, I'm not noticed" [CP, p 149] - she "helps" him with her ruinous encouragement: "But you are doing wonderful, dear." [CP, p. 149] She knows, "Attention must be paid" to such a man, but is too badly preoccupied with her security-ideal to realise that the best attention that can be paid to Willy is to hold the unaberrated mirror to him,

and to help him see himself as he is. Her words at Willy's grave are characteristic of her lack of understanding and her deluded ideal of security:

Forgive me, dear. I can't cry. I don't know what it is,
but I can't cry. I don't understand it. Why did you ever
have to do it? I search and search, and I search and I
can't understand it, Willy. I made the last payment on
the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home.
[C.P., p. 222]

However, the allusions to Willy's psychological development as a child, or to the pressures of a free-enterprise economy - whether direct or through the characters of Linda and Ben - can at best provide partial clues only to the "how" of his situation, but the play is chiefly concerned with the "why" and the answer to this lies inside of Willy's head.³⁴ The action of the play centres round Willy's human consciousness and his failure as a man is much more significant than his economic failure. Even a capitalist-supersalesman saw Willy as representing "any man whose illusions have made him incapable of dealing realistically with everyday life."³⁵ The cause of his illusions lies in his fundamental commitment, like Joe Keller's, to the ideal of the family. Willy set out in life to seek fulfilment as a husband and father. Where he went wrong, again like Keller, was in his means to achieve this fulfilment.

As a husband, he was most loving. Despite his unfaithfulness to

34 According to Miller, the title of the play was originally to be "Inside of his Head" [C.P., Introduction, p. 23]

35 A. Howard Fuller, "A Salesman is Everybody", Fortune, XXXIX (May, 1949), 80

Linda, his love for her is never in question. But he confused the ideal of marriage with the ability to confer wealth and prestige. The misplaced idealism drove him into the economic delusion known as "the American dream". A house with all the desirable contents including the old Chevrolet became his substitute for the red rose of conjugal love. He worked hard to attain it, and when failure threatened, he created an "image" of himself, and worked equally hard making Linda believe that this image was the real Willy, until she began to believe in it even more seriously than he, and would not take notice of anything but the fictional personality. When we meet her, she not only echoes his very words, but would not allow even his vision to shift from the image that he is not to the man that he is. ("Few men," she insists, "are idolised by their children the way you are." [C.P., p. 149]) In this sense, then, the hypothesis propounded above, of Linda being a touchstone of the pressures of the "system", breaks down, and she remains no more than a stylised figure symbolising an aspect of the personality of Willy himself rather than a realistic character. What Willy has done to himself is equally significant. The excessive strain he has put on himself to fit into the great breadwinner image - his proof of love for his wife - has bred an intense loneliness in him and driven him into marital infidelity. Caught in the hotel room, he feebly tries to explain to Biff, "She [The Woman]'s nothing to me. I was lonely. I was terribly lonely." [C.P., p. 208]. Pangs of conscience bring retribution on him, and he tells Linda, "I'll make up to you," but her innocent laughter transforms into the hoarse

guffaws of The Woman [C.P., pp. 150-51]. The sight of Linda mending stockings (Willy had, before his dazed son, handed over a pair of her stockings to The Woman) has the effect of an apparition, and he bursts out at her, "I won't have you mending stockings in this house!" Love, loaded with guilt, turns into bitterness.

As for the father-ideal, there is a suggestion in the play about three possible choices he could have made. The first is his own father, the inventor, the flute-maker, the worker-with-his-hands, who walked away one day and left the family to survive as best they could [C.P., p. 157]. His is the flute melody that opens the play, "small and fine, telling of grass and the trees, and the horizon." [C.P., p. 130]. From what we hear of him, he was a man who did not make a fortune because he did not know that a fortune was a thing worth making, and if his desertion of his family means anything, he needed the world's good opinion as little as its idea of conventional success. The chances of Willy going the way of his father are absolutely remote; so when the flute is heard in the play, it is no more than a very vague suggestion of a might-'ve-been.

The haunting figure of Ben embodies the second possible choice. This is not a likely one either for Willy. It is difficult to imagine him among the business buccaneers. Willy is interested in "building something" here: "A man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked!" [C.P., p. 184]. Hardly having known him in person, the larger-than-life image of Ben that appears to Willy is largely of his own

creation. As Sister M. Bettina suggests, Ben is "a facet of the intimate psychological portrayal of Willy" himself.³⁶ In this sense he is, even more than Linda, a symbolic device in the expressionist general structure of the play, and here is another reason why his presence cannot be regarded as representing any extraneous capitalist "pressure" on Willy. In fact, with his excessive self-assurance and ruthlessness ("Never fight fair with a stranger, boy" [C.P., p. 158]) he is represented somewhat comically - half caricature, half romance.

There is romance enough - liberally laced with sentiment - in the ideal that Willy does choose: Dave Singleman, the old salesman who at eighty-four could, through the strength of his personality, sit in a hotel room and command buyers. Willy admires Singleman for "dying the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of the New York, New Haven, Hartford" [C.P., p.180], without ever recognising that there is more than one way to kill a salesman. However, even Dave Singleman does not symbolise Willy's entire commitment. For the value Willy places upon himself is measured not so much by his success as a salesman as by Biff's acceptance of him as the father-idol of his adolescence. The desire for success that plagues Willy throughout the play emerges not so much as an end in itself as a means to winning back the acceptance and respect of Biff. The irony lies in the fact that he lost his respect because he

36 "Willy Loman's Brother Ben: Tragic Insight in Death of a Salesman", Modern Drama, IV (February, 1962), 411

tried to impose his phony values on his sons and now seeks to regain what he has lost by a further and continued adherence to them. Biff once adored him:

WILLY: Oh, won't that be something! Me coming into the Boston stores with you boys carrying my bags. What a sensation... You, nervous, Biff, about the game?
 BIFF: Not if you gonna be there...This Saturday, Pop, this Saturday - just for you, I'm going to break through for a touchdown. [C.P., p.145]

Willy spares no pains to spoil, even corrupt his sons. Whenever they steal, he "always give[s] them hell" but he thinks he's "got a couple of fearless characters" in them [C.P., p.158]. Although he sometimes cautions Biff to be careful with the girls, he gives himself away when he says, "No kiddin', Biff, you got a date? Wonderful!" [C.P., p.142] He fires him impulsively when either Linda or the conscientious little Bernard want him to reform Biff, but he never has the slightest interest in the moral improvement of the son.

BERNARD (entering on the run): Where is he? If he doesn't study!
 WILLY (moving forestage, with great agitation): You'll give him the answers!
 BERNARD: I do, but I can't on a Regents. That's a state exam! They're liable to arrest me!
 WILLY: Where is he? I'll whip him, I'll whip him!
 LINDA: And he'd better give back that football, Willy, it's not nice.
 WILLY: Biff! Where is he? Why is he taking everything?
 LINDA: He's too rough with the girls, Willy. All the mothers are afraid of him!
 WILLY: I'll whip him!
 BERNARD: He's driving the car without a license!
 WILLY (exploding at her [Linda]): There's nothing the matter with him! You want him to be a worm like Bernard? He's got spirit, personality...Loaded with it. Loaded! What is he stealing? He's giving it back, isn't he? I never in

my life told him anything but decent things. [CP, p. 151].

He has succeeded in dyeing the moral fabric of his sons in his own colours, but Biff (although no idealist like Chris in All My Sons, and to that extent much more realistic a character) has a greater capacity to face the truth about himself, and a restless search for self-identity. He realises eventually:

I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot
air I could never stand taking orders from anybody!
[C.P., p. 216]

And in the climactic scene toward the end, he tries to drive, like a wedge through Willy's mind, the idea:

BIFF: I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you.
You were never anything but a hardworking drummer who
landed in the ashcan like all the rest of them! ... I'm
not bringing home any prizes any more and you're going
to stop waiting for me to bring them home!

But Willy's image of himself, and his son, as well as of their relationship is absolute, and his need to prove his worth in the face of the facts so intense that he has only one answer:

I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff
Loman.
[C.P., p. 217]

For this reason, critics have dismissed Willy on the plea that he lacks awareness of the hollowness of his values and pursues them blindly until utter failure in business drives him to a despairing suicide. Kenneth Tynan said: "Willy Loman goes to his fate without knowing why it has overtaken him."³⁷ While this seems a fair enough estimate until the

"American Blues", in Tynan, Curtains, p. 260

point when he finds himself face to face with the struggle to regain his value of fatherhood, then onward Willy's consciousness grows. The twin values tied up to a double image of himself as salesman and father receive the rude shock intended by Biff's speech quoted above. Willy makes one last effort to escape the truth: "You vengeful, spiteful mut!" he shouts at Biff, but Biff goes on:

(at the peak of his fury): Pop, I'm nothing! I'm nothing, Pop. Can't you understand that? There's no spite in it any more... [Ibid.]

But the furious words are followed by a gesture: the stage direction reads, "Biff's fury has spent itself, and he breaks down sobbing, holding on to Willy who dumbly fumbles for Biff's face," which conveys the unspoken message of Biff's concern for his father, and opens Willy's eyes to another truth. Willy discovers that his dream of fatherhood has been achieved without the "fake" means he considered necessary. He says "wonderingly", "Loves me. Always loved me. Isn't that a remarkable thing?" [C.P., p. 219]. His false image of fatherhood is finally destroyed by the realisation that Biff loves him as he is and not as he has always pretended to be. The moment of insight - long warded off, suppressed and repressed - has finally arrived. Willy still cannot, of course, relinquish his dream of making Biff "Number One", and in order to provide him the foundation of a twenty-thousand dollar start through his insurance policy he drives roaring off to his death, but whereas there has been a certain degree of cowardice and remorse in his previous attempts at suicide, his last act is motivated by courage and joy and the determination of a man

about to perform the final act that will achieve the goal of his life:

"Ben, he [Biff] 'll worship me for it! ...When the mail comes he'll be ahead of Bernard again." [C.P., p. 219].

At the personal level two things are obvious in Willy's end. His commitment to his ideal of fatherhood is fulfilled, and therein lies the tragic affirmation that however false a system of values he believed he has displayed the strength of resolution to achieve it; on the other hand his self-knowledge is by no means complete. He has certainly moved far ahead of the point when he could only put into a question what he has now put into an action: how did Bernard make good?—Charley never took any interest in him! But he still clings to the belief that the expression as well as the proof of paternal love lies in providing a lucrative material start to his son. He has found the answer to the question he asked Charley, but has not quite realised whether the question was worth asking at all. It remains the tragedy of the deluded: but it is also the tragedy of the determined.

However, the quest for self-knowledge has been intense and long. If Willy has learnt no more than Miller's realism would allow him, the others have learnt a good deal, not only by his example but by the dense complexity with which Willy is portrayed and probed. They are still excavating the inside of his head over his coffin, each from his respective angle. And without doing the least damage to the realism or consistency of his character, the long exploration leading in Willy's personal case to his expiation-and-fulfilment in one, has generated a

and assessed a whole complex of social values. False as it is, the system of values on which Willy's means to his ends are founded is a system of values nonetheless. His ineffaceable belief in them makes them real, though the play does not imply anything but condemnation of them. Other characters who come into the orbit of Willy's passionate existence also make "statements" - in words as well as deeds - that invite evaluation. Prominent among the negative values in the play is, of course, the notion of personal success in a competitive society. Willy makes the conventional equation between commercial competition and personal combat. Brother Ben has a lesson for Willy's boy: "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy! You'll never get out of the jungle that way!" [loc. cit.] He illustrates his lesson by tripping Biff and menacing him with the point of his umbrella. Another equation is: "Competition is theft". Biff, infused by his father with the spirit of competition, ~~he~~ steals a carton of basket balls, a suit and, less deliberately, a fountain pen, but the equation between competition and theft is made most vividly by the waiter in the restaurant where the sons have invited the father to the fatal dinner: Happy tells him that he and his brother are going into business together - "Great," says the waiter, "That's the best for you. Because a family business, you know what I mean? - that's the best... 'Cause what's the difference? Somebody steals? It's in the family..." [C.P., p. 194]. Happy shows his competitiveness in another way. His "over-developed sense of competition" leads him into many sexual adventures: he has seduced the fiancées of three of his company's

executives, even though he admits: "...it's like this girl, see. I hate myself for it. Because I don't want the girl, and, still, I take it, and - I love it" [C.P., p. 141]. Theft becomes a compulsive activity when the sense of competition becomes overdeveloped.

Among similar peripheral "good" values suggested, but barely suggested, are Willy's "working with hands" echoed in Biff's feeling that - for him - the West is the answer. But the essential critical question that throws them into the background is - How profound are these specific counterweights? Is Miller offering a universal solution to the modern problem in these? Not all men are good with their hands [Charley, p.154]. And the point, precisely, is that Biff's "solution" is unique. The one vital answer to the evil that Salesman raises is, then, not of alternative values present within the structure of society, but of an acceptance above everything else of social responsibility by the individuality, which alone can spark the hope that the evil will eventually be dominated by the good.

FEBRUARY 12, 1950, the townsfolk of Wheeling in West Virginia assembled to pay solemn homage to Abraham Lincoln on the sixteenth president's birthday anniversary, when above everyone's voice rose one that declared the previous two decades of American history as "twenty years of treason". Joseph R. McCarthy, Republican Senator from Wisconsin, informed the gathering that he had in his possession a long list of U.S. Government employees who were members of the Communist Party. Seven years later, the forty-eight year old senator died in a naval hospital in Maryland. Whatever the previous twenty years might have stood for, the seven years since McCarthy's Wheeling statement were among the most turbulent in modern American politics. At sharp odds with the Truman administration, McCarthy bitterly attacked, among others, Dean Acheson, Secretary of State, General Marshall, and Senator Millard Tydings of Maryland. As years went by, his name gathered round it a snowball of power, suspicion, vengeance, controversy and legend. Using the Loyalty Oaths (which, incidentally, were not of McCarthy's creation, but of the Taft-Hartley Law of 1947), McCarthy launched a nationwide hunt for actual or supposed communists. Despite the inevitable controversy, he won a massive primary victory in 1952, and although a Senate Sub-Committee recommended his censure by the House in 1954, the work he began gained enough momentum to proceed actively at least for the next few years.

These "witch-hunts" were a living reality on the American scene about the time that Miller wrote his next play, The Crucible (1953), and the play is about a witch-hunt - literal rather than metaphorical - in the

New England Puritan community of Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692. The curtain rises on the Salem preacher, Reverend Parris, kneeling in prayer by the bedside of his coma-stricken, ten-year old daughter Betty, in a hushed chamber in his gloomy timber cottage. Betty is suffering from an "unnatural" malady for which the local doctor pretends to know no cure. She has been caught (along with her teenage cousin Abigail and other playmates) dancing naked around their negro slave Tituba in a moonlit forest. The villagers, including parents of some of the other girls likewise affected, hysterically swarm into the room - most of them "convinced" that witchcraft is abroad. Parris, in order to safeguard his clerical reputation and his daughter's life, has sent for an expert demonologist, Reverend John Hale of Beverly (a neighbouring village), hoping that the latter would assure him and the others that Betty is not possessed. Authorities of the state move in as well, equally anxious to preserve their righteous reputation: "the vestry room of the Salem meeting house" becomes a courtroom with Deputy Governor Danforth in the chair, Judge Hathorne conducting the proceedings, and Rev. Hale helping with the inquiries. Vengeful villagers seize the opportunity to settle old grudges by accusing their neighbours of being in communication with the devil; accused persons can get acquitted by "confessing" their guilt and, in the bargain, have others condemned by naming them as their associates in the black business. The distinction between innocent and guilty completely disappears. Among the numerous victims are a farmer, John Proctor, and his wife Elizabeth. The latter is accused of witchcraft by Abigail who

has served as a maid in the Proctor household and dismissed by Elizabeth because of an illicit affair with John. Seeking vengeance and hoping that Elizabeth's execution may lead to her own marriage with John, she contrives evidence whereby the Proctors are both arrested and brought to trial. John confesses his adulterous relationship with Abigail, but disclaims having had anything to do with witchcraft. Elizabeth, out of deference to him, denies any knowledge or suspicion of lechery in her husband. The contradicting evidence strengthens Abigail's allegation, and both John and Elizabeth are found guilty. Elizabeth, being pregnant, is not sentenced for the time being, but John must be executed. However, he is given a final opportunity to save his neck by confessing what he knows to be the false charge of witchcraft. Intense introspection resolves his conflict, and he goes to the gallows along with many fellow victims who refused to compromise.

As Marion L. Starkey's account,³⁸ Blurr's edition of the "Narratives" [39], and the records of the Massachusetts Historical Society⁴⁰ clearly indicate, there is an abundance of factual evidence for the major events of the story. Life⁴¹ published a facsimile of the arrest warrant of Proctor and his wife. And in "Journey to 'The Crucible'" Miller recalls how vividly dramatic were the records he examined at the Salem courthouse in

38 Marion L. Starkey, The Devil in Massachusetts

39 G.L. Blurr, ed., Narratives of Witchcraft

40

41 "Satan Comes to Salem", Life, XXXIV (February 9, 1953),

the spring of 1952.

Here were will, too, and deeds, and warrants sworn out, and the usual debris that a town leaves behind it... And then..dialogue! Prosecutor Hathorne is examining Rebecca Nurse. The court is full of people weeping for the young girls who sit before them strangling because Rebecca's spirit is out tormenting them. And Hathorne says, "It's awful to see your eye dry when so many are wet." And Rebecca replies, "You do not know my heart. I never afflicted no child, never in my life. I am as clear as the child unborn." ...They hanged her. She was in her seventies.⁴²

These relics of the unhappy events would be an irresistible challenge to any writer, and no wonder Longfellow drew upon them for his tragedy Giles Corey and the Salem Farms, and - as Welland observes⁴³ - at least two modern plays on the theme (Florence Stevenson's Child Play, and Louis O. Coxe's The Witchfinders) had reached the American stage before The Crucible was conceived. Which raises the obvious question, What is so special about the Miller play? After all, as the consistently sworn anti-Millerite Philip Hope-Wallace said, "all witch hunt plays are the same in the long run, unless they are written by someone like Shaw."⁴⁴

The popular American press saw The Crucible as a simple analogue of the McCarthy "witch-hunts" recounted above. "On its contemporary level [which is the only level on which the play is discussed in this article], of course," said Wolcott Gibbs in New Yorker, "Mr. Miller's piece says that witch-hunting is still among the most popular American

⁴² New York Times, February 8, 1953, II, p.3

⁴³ Welland, p. 74

⁴⁴ "Theatre", Time and Tide, XXXV (1954), 1544

pastime;" and Gibbs thought, "the parallel may seem a little strained at times since the credulity and superstition of our New England ancestors clearly exceed our own power of imagination."⁴⁵ Frieda Kirchwey could not shed her "sense of having experienced simultaneously the anguish and heroism of Salem witch-hunt and of today's."⁴⁶ The Newsweek critic insisted, "Any resemblance between those dark days and current events is strictly intentional."⁴⁷ Nor was this merely the verdict of the popular press. William H. Beyers wrote in School and Society that, in The Crucible, Miller was "pamphleteering on behalf of today's political persecution;"⁴⁸ and Eric Bentley, most 'academic' and 'classical' of the North American drama critics, though claiming complete disinterest in "whether this story of the 17th century Salem 'really' refers to our current 'witch-hunt'", he nonetheless found the play's chief recommendation in that "...above all, at a time when we are all being 'investigated'...it is moving to see images of 'investigation' before the footlights." [49]. In "The Liberal Conscience in 'The Crucible'" - according to Bentley, "the best analysis of Mr. Miller yet written - Robert Warshow claimed:

Mr Miller has nothing to say about the Salem trials and makes only the flimsiest pretext that he has. The Crucible

45 "The Devil to Pay", New Yorker, XXVIII (Jan. 31, 1953), 39

46 "The Crucible", Nation, CLXXVI (February 7, 1953), 131

47 "Theater", Newsweek, XLI (February 2, 1953), 68

48 "The Devil at Large", School and Society, LXXVII (Mar. 21, 1953), 185

49 "Miller's Innocence", New Republic, CCXXVIII (Feb. 16, 1953), 23

was written to say something about Alger Hiss and Owen Lattimore, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, Senator McCarthy, the actors who lost their jobs on radio and television, in short the whole complex that is spoken of, with a certain lowering of the voice, as the "present atmosphere".⁵⁰

In considering Miller's own position in this somewhat one-sided debate it may be fair to remember that "the idea of dramatising the Salem witch-trials had been in his mind for a considerable time, in fact, as far back as his student days at the University of Michigan in the 'thirties."⁵¹ His fascination with the subject was as much aesthetic as polemical. " 'Salem,' he explains, 'is one of the few dramas in history with a beginning, a middle and an end. The drama is complete because the people saw the error of their ways soon after the tragedy occurred.' "⁵² But, the Griffins go on, "He adds that he could not have written the play at any other time than the present."⁵³

It must then be admitted that although historical facts had fired the imagination of the author, and his staunch faith in social responsibility must have added fuel to the fire, the most immediate impulse to write The Crucible came from contemporary events on the American scene. But how utterly wrong were the critics who emphasised, above everything else, the topicality of the play, has been demonstrated, among other things, by such productions of the play as have been removed, in either time or space, from the sphere of Senator McCarthy's power. The enormous

50 "Arthur Miller Discusses 'The Crucible'; as told to John and Alice Griffins", Theatre Arts, XXXVII (October, 1953),

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

reception accorded the Laurence Olivier revival in 1965 is a case in point. During my limited acquaintance with the British theatre I have not known English audiences witness even an Irish play with a lesser awareness of its being "foreign" than they did this supposed parable of McCarthy's America. Perhaps they were much too fascinated by its un-American English to view it as anything but an historical or "period" piece, though one would rather doubt this explanation. Many of them had heard of the husband of Marilyn Monroe's troubles with Congressional authorities (which the 1953 critics - not endowed with prophetic powers - knew nothing about);⁵³ many more knew of McCarthyism in general; some had seen earlier British productions of the play including the very successful one by Warren Jenkins at Bristol; perhaps even read Hope-Wallace or The Observer - both equally at pains to draw the "parallels" sharply. Despite all pre-conditioning, however, the National Theatre performance was received purely on the implicit premises of the play - as a drama of the corruption of a community (which might well have been their own) where the individual members are basically law abiding and apparently committed to certain principles, even ideals, yet capable of being deluded into collective evil by their prejudices - a pattern by no means exclusive to the United States of the 1950's. It was rightly seen, too, as the tragedy of an honest but imperfect man's struggle to make of such a world a home. This, rather than the "parallels" so obvious to the

⁵³ Miller himself got involved only in 1954, and he did not get into real trouble (over "contempt of Congress") until 1957

American critics, is the essential theme of The Crucible.

The black social backcloth to this tragedy is painted with a peculiar, sombre harmony. Although the action of the play divides its characters into protagonists and antagonists, there is a strong sense of the polis about the Salem society. There is a family likeness about the basic assumptions of the characters although the precise actions of each individual eventually spring from his peculiar psychological make-up. Paradoxically, Danforth bears a marked similarity to Rebecca Nurse. They both believe in divine justice; witness Danforth: "...While I speak of God's law, I will not crack its voice with whimpering" [C.P., p. 318]; and Rebecca: "Let you [John] fear nothing. Another judgment waits us all!" [C.P., p. 328]. Neither has a sense of personal guilt; each sees life as a straight line, capable of perfect comprehension; neither admits of the complexity, even confusion, of it: Rebecca is merely "astonished" [p. 325] at John's lie to save his life. She would not mind sacrificing him to a principle: nor would Danforth — he would "hang ten thousand that dared to rise against...[God's] law, and an ocean of salt tears could not melt the resolution of the statutes" [C.P., p. 318]. The role of individual psychology may, however, be better illustrated by comparing Danforth and Hale. Like Danforth, Hale too is confident of his moral position. He has the evil "caught, defined and calculated" in his books [C.P., p. 253], but while no one could make Danforth or Rebecca revise their "convictions", Hale is subject to doubt:

HALE: ... Mister, I have myself examined Tituba, Sarah Good,

and numerous others that have confessed to dealing with witchcraft!

PROCTOR: And why not if they must die for denying it? There are them them that will swear to anything before they'll hang; have you never thought of that? [my emphasis]

HALE: I have. I - I have indeed. (It is his own suspicion, but he resists it.) [C.P., p. 275]

But the resistance has weakened considerably when, unable to decide who is right and who is wrong, he is unknowingly driven to side with Francis Nurse against Parris's accusation that the former is committing "contempt of court" by not disclosing the names of those who have signed the deposition.

HALE (to Parris, trying to contain himself): Is every defense an attack upon the court? Can no one— ? [C.P., p. 292]

To him, in the end, "life is God's most precious gift; no principle, however glorious, may justify the taking of it." [C.P., p. 320].

Generally, it is a self-righteous society. Parris is accused of his love of money far-exceeding his devotion to his calling, but he reminds Proctor: "I am not some preaching farmer with a book under my arm; I am a graduate of Harvard College." [C.P., p. 245]. This may represent the embryonic beginnings of the concept of a meritocracy where a mere Willy becomes a Lo-man, or the excesses of authority in general; but on the psychological level, Parris is quite sure in his mind that he is not getting his due for his service to the community. His mental make-up prompts him to make exceptional claims on society, to which different members react differently. Some become his "enemies" [C.P., p. 231], although they continue to attend his sermons. A man like Proctor, who

does not believe in "enmity" simply stops coming to church. Thus the personal considerations of one member motivate such actions as result in the alienation of another. Again, as preacher and theologian, Parris shares with the community a general belief in the evil forces, and in witchcraft. But like most other characters he is capable of making a compromise when his own job, his reputation, and his daughter's life is at stake.

Abigail is the most self-seeking, the most destructive, plot-wise the most central but as a character the least complex, figure in the play. She is something less than three-dimensional. However, deluded as she is, even has a kind of faith in spiritual life. To herself, she has undergone a great change in the course of the action, almost believing in her martyrdom. How can others be blind to it! A miniature Saint Joan is come to Salem: "And God gave me the strength to call them liars, and God made men to listen to me, and by God I will scrub the world clean for love of Him!" [C.P., p.]. Suddenly, however, the religious ecstasy breaks to reveal the reason behind it. "Oh John, I will make you such a wife when the world is white again! You will be amazed to see me every day, a light of heaven in your house." [C.P., p.]. In Sartre's film of the play, Les Sorcières de Salem, Elizabeth herself absolves Abigail. If I remember it correctly, the last English subtitle on the screens reads: "She loved him!" The mixed motivation of self-righteousness — a social dimension — and lustful desire for Proctor — a psychological dimension, lead her to initiate the tremendously destructive action

of the play. Similarly the activities of the girls in the woods may, in part at least, be attributed to sexual repression, a motive at once social and psychological.

The only outsider in Salem, one who is not a member of the polis because she does not share the Christian attitudes to sorcery, is the negro-slave, Tituba, with her bag of Barbados incantations. One cannot attribute the evil of the play to her either, because by her (social as well as personal) standards there is no evil in witchcraft.

Proctor's alienation, mentioned above, as a result of Parris's motives is really mainly physical. He cannot break away from society morally. For, present under his very roof, is a living symbol of the society that is Salem: it is his wife. Elizabeth admits to being "cold" [C.P., p. 323]. Her later explanation for it ("John, I counted myself so plain, so poorly made, no honest love could come to me! ...I never knew how I could say my love" [C.P., p. 323]) may be the most valid one, but to John, her coldness could not represent anything but another image of the Puritanic coldness of Salem, and its lack of love. She seems inhospitable [pp. 261-62], uncharitable and suspicious [pp. 261, 265]. His attempt to live in this cold home, which is really an objective correlative to Salem, has been, like Willy Loman's, misguided. He has failed in understanding, and has embraced guilt in ^{his} relationship with Abigail. The flaw in his marriage, intensified by the act of adultery, allows the trials to materialise; no act - not even the most intimate of sexual relations - can remain isolated in the society they are part of. The

symbolic fusion of the social and the psychological is discernible in Proctor's speeches, especially in moments of crisis. "I cannot speak," he says, but I am doubted ...as though I come into a court when I come into this house." [C.P., p. 265]. At the time of his arrest he protests, "Is the accuser always holy now?" [p. 281]. There is a multiplicity of reference about his words. While the obvious reference is a social one - i.e. Parris, or the girls (collectively) are not holy - it applies as much to Abigail individually. And what about Elizabeth? Is she "holy" enough to accuse John? But, above all, it is a personal and private reference as well, for John himself learns that he is not as holy as he had thought. Again, however high he may stand in the moral hierarchy of the Salem company, John's moral values are shared in some ways by even the most negative members. One of his concerns, indeed the most decisive one in the end, is for his "name"—the name he is called upon to relinquish by signing it to a false confession to be made public, the name which eventually he must, at all costs, preserve — "Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies...How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul, leave me my name!" [C.P., p. 328] This is what Parris wants to preserve, too. Even Abigail is in some sense aware of its value. She retorts to Parris's suspicions: "My name is good in the village! I will not have it said that my name is soiled!" [C.P., p. 232], although (regardless of her plea that the forest episode was mere "sport"[C.P., pp 231, 240]) there is no denying that she has given away her "soul" by

drinking blood as a charm to end Elizabeth's life. And despite his distance from them John is aware of the significance of their names to the most degraded members of the community. Of those who have "confessed" to having seen Martha Corey with the devil, he says, "They think to go like saints. I like not to spoil their names." [C.P., p. 326]. On the personal plane this reluctance to judge the moral cowardice of others is due to an acute awareness of his own guilt: "I speak of my own sins; I cannot judge another." [Ibid.] Of course, "sins" is said ironically, but the irony is really twofold, for John's sustained effort of a compromise is to him as much of a guilt as the wild accusations of the girls.

What distinguishes Proctor from the common herd of humanity (or inhumanity) in Salem is not any basic godliness, but a greater self-awareness and a still greater self-investigation. Where most others are only capable of feeling, he tries to conquer feeling by thought. Greed, lust and frustration are feelings inherent in the "guiltiness" of some of the characters. Abigail's lust for Proctor, Parris's lust for authority, Putnam's for land, and the consequent frustration of all three; Mrs Putnam's frustration in maternity - eight of her children died at birth - and the consequent hatred for the less unfortunate; these are the motive forces behind their actions. Delusion may perhaps be regarded as erroneous thinking, but the delusion of the girls who cry witch surely has an emotional dimension to it. Mary Warren loses her grip on the cerebral activity that Proctor has tried to rouse in

her, when an hysterical emotion takes over she joins the others for whom she feels a kinship, and accuses the very man who had put some "sense" - Jane Austenian connotation - into her head.

John, too, being human, is vulnerable to emotion. The initial impression he makes may fairly be described as an emotional one. "... a farmer in his middle thirties...powerful of body" in whose presence "Abigail has stood as though on tiptoe" [C.P., pp. 238-39]; who has "lusted" for Abigail: these are by no means suggestions of an intellectual personality. His sexual attractiveness is emphasised by the fact that Abigail is prepared to murder in order to possess him - a fact that, incidentally endows him with a certain grandeur in the context of the plot. A different and bleak emotionality characterises his lonely domestic life. Guilt and fear mark his demeanour at home, and he struggles in vain to cloak them in petty lies. He cannot take Elizabeth's suggestion to go to court and expose Abigail for fear his own relationship with her should come to light. He lies to Elizabeth that he saw the girl "with a crowd": the next moment he has to admit he was alone with her when she confessed that there was no witchcraft in the woods [C.P., p. 264]. It is not so much for awe of Elizabeth's suspicion as for his own feeling of guilt that he has "gone tiptoe in this house all seven months since she [Abigail] is gone." [C.P., p. 265]. And this is not surprising for, despite his protestations of honesty to his wife, he "may [still] think of [Abigail] softly from time to time" [C.P., p. 241]. His dislike of authoritarianism of the church is

really directed against one individual priest. His reasons for not attending church are at best dubious. Parris tells Abigail of a rumour that Goody Proctor does not come to church because she will not sit "close to something soiled" [C.P., p. 232], but Abigail has been dismissed from the Proctors' service only seven months whereas John's "soft" record as a practising Christian goes further back, i.e. to the past seventeen months [C.P., p. 252] — coincident, perhaps, with the beginning of his adulterous relationship. There is obviously a personal guilt complex connected with his denunciation of Parris.

However, positive qualities emerge almost simultaneously. Proctor displays a certain courage in his open defiance of Parris. He shows considerable determination against his lurking lust for Abigail. He will not grumble at Elizabeth's small failings — her lack of spice symbolised in her unseasoned cooking. "Somewhat bewildered" as he is, according to Elizabeth, he reveals a definite potentiality for an understanding of his own contradictions and a struggle against his fears. Mary Warren [C.P., pp. 265-69] brings news of the goings-on in town, of the court which has ordered hangings by the dozen of those who have refused to confess to witchcraft, of the many ~~more~~ accused — Elizabeth Proctor among them. Proctor's first reaction is emotional; he threatens Mary with violence, and forbids her to go to Salem any more even though she warns him that she is an "official of the court" and that it was she who saved his wife's life. Passionate threats give way, however, to calm reasoning through which Proctor sees for himself and makes Mary

see that Abigail's is not the righteous camp. He is helped in this personal realisation by every small detail of the action that immediately ensues. Mary's warning that Abigail will accuse him of "lechery", Hale's unexpected visit [C.P., pp. 275-83], his spiritual interrogation of Proctor, the latter's failure to utter the commandment relating to adultery, open John's eyes not only to Abigail's true nature but to the very nature of his relationship with her. His marital value suddenly acquires hitherto unknown proportions. The circumstances of Elizabeth's arrest deepen this awareness. He is in no doubt that he will not let his wife pay with her life for the guilt that resides in his. Her love, so far masked from him by her self-righteous and unforgiving behaviour, becomes apparent to him. He obtains from Mary Warren what he is convinced is a true confession - that she saw no spirits. Although this effort ends in a fiasco, the failure turns his individual struggle into one with much wider social implications. Two ironic gestures show how his personal fight for his wife's life grows into a public fight against evil in Salem. Firstly, although the charge against Elizabeth is dropped for a year, Proctor insists on pressing his deposition: he is now fighting for Giles and the others who, his reason tells him, are innocent. Secondly, when Abigail refuses to confess anything more than dancing in the woods - a situation that would have most satisfied him previously - John himself volunteers public confession of his adulterous relation with her. It is not revenge he is seeking, for emotion has been completely forsaken at this point. It is not even Abigail the individual he is

fighting, but the evil she symbolises.

However, Proctor knows himself to be a party to a portion of this evil, and the focus of his struggle narrows down for a while to his personal "evil". When we see him in Act Four, he is a transformed character compared to the man we have known in the earlier parts of the play. The stage direction describes him as "another man", and Miller - usually very economical about the physical description of his characters - pictures him as "bearded, filthy, his eyes misty as though webs had overgrown them" [C.P., p. 320]. The change in his appearance, realistically depicted as it is, provides too a symbolic index to the quality and intensity of the inner change that Proctor has undergone. "I hear nothin', where I am kept," he tells Elizabeth [C.P., p. 322]; the months in prison have been spent in intense introspection and Proctor has lost most of his self-righteousness. Elizabeth's account of how Giles Corey responded to the weight of the stones laid on his chest shakes whatever self-confidence he is left with and - "(...with great force of will, but not quite looking at her): I have been thinking I would confess to them, Elizabeth. (She shows nothing). What say you? If I give them that?" [C.P., p.322]. The filth in his appearance does not reflect a corresponding spiritual degeneration, but only the "filth" that Proctor himself has begun to perceive in himself. He believes that it would be a fraud for him to die like a saint and blemish the honour of those that hang.

I cannot mount the gibbet like a saint. It is a fraud.

I am not the man. (She is silent.) My honesty is broke,
Elizabeth. I am no good man. Nothing's spoiled by
giving them the lie that were not rotten long before.
[C.P., p. 322]

Obviously he wants his life, but he wants it almost as an expiation. And, in any case, he is far from certain yet. The clue to his state of mind is provided, not so much by the actual proposition he makes, as by the tone of uncertainty engendered by his conflict — "I have been thinking..." His struggle with his conscience is by no means over. In Elizabeth he finds both a reflection of his own position and an inspiration. Her acceptance of her share of guilt — "I have read my heart this three months...I have sins of my own to count. It need a cold wife to prompt lechery...suspicion kissed you when I did..." [C.P., p. 323] — intensifies John's awareness of his: "(...for the first time he turns directly to her): I would have your forgiveness, Elizabeth." But her reply — "John, it come to naught that I should forgive you, if you'll not forgive yourself" — not only lays on him the total responsibility for his decision but makes him "pursue self-awareness beyond the awareness of guilt." His meeting with Elizabeth brings him a profound recognition of their mutual love, hitherto masked by Elizabeth's relentless posture. On the one hand this arouses his concern for his children.⁵⁴ "It is a pretense," he insists, "...that will not blind God nor keep my children out of the wind." But at the

54 At the opening of Act Four, in Salem, "there are orphans wandering from house to house."

same time, the private love itself enlarges Proctor's understanding of the meaning of love. To save his life he makes the confession, but soon realises that it will be used as a weapon against those he loves, and he tears it up. "You'll not use me. It is no part of salvation that should use me" [C.P., p. 327]. He now sees acceptance of life as a compromise, a loss of personal integrity. A faith in this ideal of personal identity - his "name", his conscience, his immortal soul - which all Miller's heroes share, forces upon him the realisation that, paradoxically, John Proctor will be "dead" if he accepts life on the terms on which it is offered, and his children will then be "orphaned": "I have three children," he cries, "How may I teach them to walk like men...and I sold my best friends?" [C.P., p. 327]. The realisation resolves Proctor's conflict. Knowing himself a lesser being than Rebecca or Giles, he recognises and endeavours to identify with their values. With promethean defiance he chooses his own fate - and his dignity, "And the drums rattle like bones in the morning air..." [C.P., p. 329].

Inasmuch as the denouement is marked by Proctor's ultimate refusal to hand over his conscience, the parallels that the play may suggest to contemporary use and abuse of public or state authority - in or outside the United States - are valid. Bentley's argument that the play is concerned with one of his (Bentley's) three categories⁵⁵ of communism

55 op. cit. The three uses of the word "communism", according to Bentley, are: "the politics of Marx"; "the politics of the Soviet Union"; and "the activities of all liberals as they appear to illiberal illiterates". Crucible is limited in scope to the third meaning.

is beside the point. But the really disturbing criticism of the play is not the political but the artistic. If Death of a Salesman was dismissed as "low tragedy" by some critics, The Crucible has not escaped similar generic strictures either. William Beyer found it "loud, long and unrelentingly melodramatic;"⁵⁶ J.C. Trewin called it "historical melodrama;"⁵⁷ the Time critic, "sociological melodrama;"⁵⁸ Tynan complained that Miller "prejudges those whom he accuses of prejudice, and the last scene, in which Proctor goes to the noose, plays like old melodrama."⁵⁹ The consensus seems to be based on two common assumptions: first, a widely held view that Proctor is a "victim"; the other (to which Miller himself has contributed in no small measure), that it is a dramatisation of pure black and pure white, of absolute evil and absolute good. A corollary that follows from this is that The Crucible is a thesis play, and therefore undramatic, or vice versa. George Jean Nathan, while recognising a certain "power" and "intellectual purpose" in the play, regretted that "the power is that of an impersonal machine and the intellectual purpose that of a historical analyst, with a dramatist late in arriving on the scene and, when he does arrive, too deeply impressed and overcome by the materials to guide them into dramatic life."⁶⁰

56 op. cit., p. 185

57 "Blanket of the Dark", Illustrated London News, CCXXV (Nov 27, 1954)964

58 "The Theater", Time, LXI (Feb 2, 1953), 42 [Atlantic ed.]

59 Curtains, p. 253

60 "The Crucible", Theatre Arts, XXXVII (April, 1953), 25

It would be futile to deny an apparent sense of helpless victimisation in the play, but the above discussion of the text should, it is hoped, indicate too that Proctor does not die the death of a victim. The guilt in the world around him no doubt provides the immediate provocation for his long search into his soul, but in the end he allows no one to be his judge. From his point of view, the "suicide" is an act of self-realisation, committed in full consciousness of his fate and his values.

As for the other charge, about good and evil in the play, there is no doubt again that The Crucible is an exploration into the nature of human goodness and human evil; of how evil grows from psychological frustrations aided by socially conditioned prejudices; of how the spread of evil can bring calumny and death to not only innocent but saintly people. But, above all, how it can bring out, in a man who is no saint, goodness that might otherwise have remained dormant. It is significant that Miller chose for the central figure of the play a man with a very considerable degree of human vulnerability, occupying, as it were, a medial position on the moral spectrum, and ranged other characters on both sides of him. Referring to the "unrelieved badness" of the prosecution, Miller attributes it at first to historical fact, but he soon begins to regret that he did not make the "evil" characters "evil enough". If he were, to rewrite the play, he declares, he would accentuate their evil natures still more. [C.P., pp. 42-44]. These are, of course, afterthoughts born of his own agonising involvement with

the contemporary "witch-hunt" to which critical opinion likes to relate everything in the play; and it is fortunate that his feelings had not been thus embittered at the time of writing it. We are concerned, at any rate, with the text as it stands, and in it, as has been suggested in the above analysis, the "badness" of the "bad" characters is far from "unrelieved". Danforth's badness lies in his adherence to a "principle" that the community as a whole shares. The difference between him and Proctor is not so much one of native "goodness", but that any search for self-knowledge is, in Danforth's case, impeded by his choice in favour of conformity to the community's values, and his mistaken understanding of his rôle as a person in authority. There are moments when he just begins to question this rôle; for instance when he is "put off" by Mary Warren's sudden "turnabout" [C.P., p. 298], but he never pursues his doubts, and therefore the truth, far enough. Moreover, as Welland suggests, some allowance at least must be made him for the fact that he is called upon to "judge in the light of evidence of an unprecedented nature."⁶¹ Toward Abigail, as has already been shown, Miller's attitude is clearly ambivalent, and her character is psychologically understandable. The Putnams (whatever their rôle in the tragedy recorded by history) are relatively insignificant in the play. And Hale comes so close to Proctor's own position that he narrowly escapes being the hero. (In fact at least one critic

61 Welland, p. 84

has made out a substantial case for Hale as the man who reaches nearest the truth.⁶²) The real source of evil in The Crucible, then, is not calculated villainy on the part of the characters, but the defeat of reason, and misunderstanding or denial of human responsibility. On the positive side, the ultimate role played by the evil is not the hanging of innocent people for melodrama's sake, but the visualisation of personal and social truth by those who are disposed to seek it. As for the dramatist "arriving late on the scene," the above account of the complexity with which the twin forces of social concern and psychological motivation are knitted into the fabric of Proctor's consciousness and eventually resolve his conflict, should provide some indication of the general complexity and coherence that marks the play as a whole. The Crucible may not be the greatest of Miller's achievements, but it certainly is no modern morality play - presenting an argument when it ought to represent a human being.

IF The Crucible reflects the temper of our times by implication, Miller's next major play, A View from the Bridge (1955)⁶³ touches at the very heart of a contemporary situation. Once again, as in Salesman,

62 William Wiegand, "Arthur Miller and 'The Man Who Knows'", Western Review, XXI (1957)

63 Date of New York production and first publication - as a one-act play. The version used here is, however, the two-act, produced in London and published in 1956. Page-references are to this text as printed in the Collected Plays.

the scene is Brooklyn. The precise neighbourhood is the dockland slum that, American friends say, is what they only see from Brooklyn bridge. A View from the Bridge, then, is in a literal sense a slice of life that most Americans do not get a chance to observe often, yet a life upon the shores of the New World throbbing with passions as ancient as the Atlantic itself.

Eddie Carbone, a kindly longshoreman of Sicilian origin, lives in one of these tenements with his wife Beatrice and her eighteen-year old niece Catherine whom they have brought up like a daughter. Eddie helps two of his wife's cousins from Sicily in entering the United States illegally, and provides them room-shelter in his house. The older of these, Marco, struggles hard on the docks to send money to his starving family; the younger brother, the blond and unmarried Rodolpho, who enjoys singing, cooking and sewing, falls in love with Catherine. This rouses a violent jealousy in Eddie who is possessed by a passion for Catherine which he can neither accept nor understand. Eddie convinces himself, and tries to convince Catherine, that Rodolpho simply wishes to marry her in order to gain American citizenship. He tries to make the neighbourhood, and Catherine, think that the boy is a homosexual. Still thwarted, he betrays the two brothers to the immigration authorities, and two other immigrants in the bargain; but the betrayal costs him his life as Marco turns Eddie's knife into its owner.

One is tempted, at this point, to go back to the earlier Brooklyn play, and to recall a recent revival (by Michael Rudman, at the Play-

house, Nottingham, 1967). John Neville was hardly the actor who came to mind when one thought of Willy Loman, but he brought a new depth and clarity to the rôle by using certain features of his personality which another actor might have regarded as handicaps.⁶⁴ Particularly notable was his attitude in the matter of speech. Where most non-American actors would bleed to acquire an American - or New York - accent, Neville went only half-way, but supported it with an echo, strong in emotional moments, of a Germanic origin. Matching with his Nordic head and face, it became the key to the play and his ver surroundings changed colour accordingly. America became the vast jungle to which he and brother Ben came with the emigrant dream of picking up golden leaves in the fall, the jungle in which Willy is lost. His injunctions to his sons - not to whistle in the elevator; not to say "Gee", for it is a boy's word - sounded like bits of an immigrant folklore, hard won cultural information adhered to and propagated in a society where old principles offer no guidance. The play became, in short, an "immigrant tragedy" - an aspect that had never been illuminated before.

With this in mind, one is bound to regard A View from the Bridge as not only a logical step in the development of the playwright, but as something of a cross between Death of a Salesman and The Crucible. For in a less superficial sense, the bridge from which the action of the play is viewed is a bridge over the Atlantic, in terms of space between Syracuse, N.Y. and Siracusa, Sicily, and in terms of time

between a bygone age which perpetuated a law of honour and our own when law (and conscience) are the preserve of the state. The characters are people of an ancient lineage, reborn on the Brooklyn waterfront, "yet still the prey of those smoldering buried passions that wrought the classical tragedies."⁶⁴ As in All My Sons, there is a predominant sense of a polis. These Italian longshoremen are a small community. They know one another, if not intimately, at least personally. The absence of surnames is characteristic of their near-intimacy. A tradition among them, whereby they aid and shelter illegal immigrants from their unhappy country is the product of a common memory of a tribal organisation, and an ethnic loyalty markedly akin to family loyalty.

At the beginning of the play, Eddie wholly subscribes to this code of kinship. He eagerly announces to Beatrice the arrival of her cousins [C.P., p. 381] and reassures her that all arrangements regarding their safe entry have been seen to. While anxious to retain a degree of personal comfort in his own house, he is truly concerned about the more essential question of the cousins' protection from the immigration law. He deems it an honour to do his duty unto these countrymen he has never seen:

I was just thinkin' before, comin' home, suppose my father didn't come to this country, and I was starvin' like them

⁶⁴ Margaret Webster, "A Look at the London Season", Theatre Arts, XLI (May, 1957), 23

over there ...and I had people in America could keep me a couple of months? The man would be honored to lend me a place to sleep...

[C.P., p. 383]

He warns Beatrice and Catherine not to utter a word about the newcomers to anyone [C.P., pp. 382, 388], and tells Catherine about a Vinny Bolzano who "snitched" on an uncle who was an illegal immigrant, and brought upon himself the wrath of his family:

CATHERINE: Ts! So what happened to him?

BEATRICE: I think he went away. (To Eddie) I never seen him again, did you?

EDDIE...: Him? You'll never see him no more, a guy do a thing like that? How's he gonna show his face?... [C.P., p. 389]

Eddie knows too well that Bolzano's betrayal of his uncle comprised a fatal violation of an inviolable communal tradition, a law of the polis, a religious principle which may not coincide with the secular law of the New World but is nonetheless deeper than it. This knowledge, or rather belief, provides Eddie his vital connection with his society which recognises the need of man to help his brothers. It is a measure of his conscience which is "also the conscience of his friends, co-workers, and neighbors and not just his own autonomous creation." [C.P.: Introduction, p. 53].

This "good" society of which Eddie is a part is but an oasis in the vast desert of American life, subject to the latter's climatic pressures, and having undergone considerable change as a consequence. Red Hook, Brooklyn (Alfieri - the narrator-chorus lawyer - tells us at the beginning of the play) was a different neighbourhood in the early days - "there were many who were justly shot by unjust men," but now it

is "quite civilized, quite American" [emphasis added], "Now we settle for half and we like it better." [C.P., p. 379]. Although the Old World code of Sicily no more obtains here, in its entirety, a residue of the old ethic still persists, and must inevitably lead to an occasional conflict of social values. This conflict is represented, in terms of the play's action, by the relationships within Eddie's household. For parallel to an implicit condemnation in the play of an American social system (which makes "submarines" of poor immigrants and regards informers as law-abiding citizens) is Eddie's disapproval of Catherine's American ways. Catherine, seventeen years old, born and bred entirely on the American soil, is the new woman in the house. Her first appearance emphasises her "new" clothes [C.P., p. 380]; she likes to dress and move about in style; she reads movie magazines [p. 411]; a degree of adherence to the spirit of free enterprise is inherent in her - she is the best student at the secretarial school [pp. 384-85] and wants to work and be independent. Rodolpho, who is generally attracted by the more glamorous aspects of the American scene, finds her "beautiful"; according to Eddie himself, she is the "madonna" figure in the family [C.P., p. 386]. On the other hand, he is forty, "husky, slightly overweight" [C.P., p. 379], with a marked loyalty to the old European code already described above. He finds her skirt too short, her heels too high, her walk too wavy, her attentions to youngmen like Louis wholly undesirable. The announcement that Catherine wants to accept the job she has been offered elicits his immediate disapproval.

EDDIE: Look, did I ask you for money? I supported you this long I support you a little more. Please do me a favor, will ya? I want you to be with different type of people. I want you to be in a nice office, Maybe a lawyer's office someplace in New York in one of them nice buildings. I mean if you're gonna get outa here then get out; don't go practically in the same kind of neighborhood.

[C.P., p. 385]

Even from an objective point of view the objections spring, at least partially, from a simple protective instinct in Eddie. From his own - subjective - standpoint, there is nothing but the best of motives behind them. He would like her to complete her stenography course, and - if she must forsake the protection of a home that he has gladly provided her - strive toward a better life than he has been able to provide. His exceptions to her appearance and demeanour may be regarded, too, as typical of a Roman Catholic parent anxious to guard the daughter against any possibilities of a pre-marital sexual involvement.

Katie, I promised your mother on her deathbed. I'm responsible for you. You're a baby, you don't understand these things. I mean like when you stand here by the window, wavin' outside.

[C.P., p. 381]

Catherine's youthful - and, perhaps, American - desire for independence prompts her to resist this parental tyranny. At first she objects that Eddie has a generally negative attitude toward her male friends; but when the question of her proposed employment comes in for discussion, she is much more firm upon her stand, and forces him to consent [C.P., p. 386].

While the struggle of wills between Eddie and Catherine continues

almost throughout the play, it would be foolhardy to dismiss it in terms purely of Eddie's "simple protective instinct" described above. For co-existing with this, right from the start, is an intense sexual feeling which manifests itself, at first, in a generally possessive behaviour toward Catherine:

EDDIE: Listen, I could tell you things about Louis which you wouldn't wave to him no more.

CATHERINE: (trying to joke him out of his warning): Eddie, I wish there was one guy you couldn't tell me things about.

[C.P., p. 381]

Eddie is, of course, unconscious of his obsession and Catherine seems at best good-humouredly confused by it, but her observation leaves one in no doubt that the ground is ready for the fateful interplay of characters even before all of them are brought on the stage. This possessiveness is challenged and aggravated, on the one hand by Catherine's increasing insistence upon her rights, and, on the other, by the alarm that Rodolpho's appearance on the scene rings in Eddie.⁶⁵ Rodolpho's admiration of the Carbone house, his account of the poverty in Italy, his frequent contrasts between the old country and America, his final declaration that he would stay in America "forever" for it is here that he hopes to grow "rich", together with his remark, "I have no money to get married. I have a nice face but no money," reveals to Eddie the youngman's self-confidence, determination and romantic aspir-

65 C.P., pp. 391-96

-ations. His humorous explanation for his blond hair ("A thousand years ago, they say, the Danes invaded Sicily" [p. 392]), his mischievously ironic reference to the wives of Sicilian emigrés (he says, Marco "trusts his wife" [p. 393]), and his perfectly uninhibited display of his histrionic talent with the song of the "Paper Doll"[396] provide a measure of his buoyant spirits. Catherine's curiosity about Rodolpho's marital status, her encouragement to let him go ahead with the song despite Eddie's attempts to quiet him, and, above all, the keen irony of the song itself ("...it's tough to love a doll that's not your own/...I'm gonna buy a paper doll that I can call my own,/ A doll that other fellows cannot steal.") hit Eddie with the force of a public challenge. "Eddie rises and moves upstage" in nervous confusion while the singer goes on with an almost portentous pronouncement of his victory:

And then those flirty, flirty guys
With their flirty, flirty eyes
Will have to flirt with dollies that are real.

Although Eddie silences Rodolpho under the pretext that the singing may arouse undue curiosity in the neighbourhood, yet by now he knows that he is face to face with a formidable antagonist under his very roof, for Catherine is quite obviously enchanted by Rodolpho.

It is not a simple romantic triangle that Eddie is caught up in, but an extremely intricate web of relationships with strong characters exerting their full might to stretch it in all sorts of unfavourable directions. The major part of Eddie's stimulation comes, no doubt, from

Catherine and Rodolpho. The opening scene ends with the two laughing together [C.P., p. 397] - as if at him; before long they are out together, and when they return to face Eddie's jealous censure, Catherine firmly defends Rodolpho:

Why don't you talk to him, Eddie? He blesses you and you don't talk to him hardly. [C.P., p. 402]

In Act Two she is completely in the opposite camp. Eddie discovers her emerging from the bedroom, smoothing her dress, Rodolpho following her. When he orders Rodolpho to pack up at once, Catherine - to his astonishment - declares that she will leave too [C.P., p. 422]. Rodolpho, here, is far from the "Paper Doll" that Eddie makes him out to be.

Significant as their actions are, it is the nature of the young lovers even more than their actions, that precipitates Eddie's passion. Being complex and elusive, they aid his self-deception. There is a marked ambivalence in Catherine herself. Something of the "baby", the "little girl" is certainly in evidence in her mental make-up. Her proclamations of independence and self-awareness are accompanied by grave misgivings. One moment she adamantly refuses to listen to Eddie's explanation that Rodolpho wants to "marry her passport"; "No, I don't believe it," she says, "...I don't want to hear it. ...He loves me!" [CP p. 403]; the next finds her arguing with Beatrice about the uncertainty of her moral position:

BEATRICE: I don't understand this. He is not your father, Catherine.

CATHERINE:(as one who herself is trying to rationalize a buried impulse): What am I going to do, just kick him in

the face with it?

BEATRICE: Look, honey, you wanna get married, or don't you wanna get married?

CATHERINE (quietly, trembling): I don't know, B. It just seems wrong if he's against it so much.

[C.P., p. 404]

Baby-like she proceeds to cross-examine Rodolpho's proposal for marriage with Eddie's arguments — would Rodolpho marry her if it involved getting out of America? [C.P., p. 419]. Even at times when she does ascend to adulthood, she betrays what Miller calls the "buried impulse", her reciprocal — if equally unacknowledged — sexual attachment to Eddie. "I'm not a baby," she reminds Rodolpho,

Beatrice says to be a woman, but— ...then why don't she be a woman? If I were a wife I would make a man happy instead of goin' at him all the time. I can tell a block away when he's blue in his mind and just wants to talk to somebody quiet and nice... I can tell when he's hungry or wants a beer before he even says anything. I know when his feet hurt him, I mean I know him and now I'm supposed to turn around and make a stranger out of him?

[C.P., p. 421]

The emphatic "I know him" is said almost with the archetypal unconscious force of the biblical connotation of the word. Yet even this certainty gives place to doubt, and instantly she is crying in Rodolpho's arms, begging him to "Teach me. I don't know anything... Teach me." It is a long and gradual struggle she has with herself, and after the fatal kissing scene [C.P., p. 422] her mind is made up — and then, too, not finally or completely. The persistent uncertainty of her attitude toward Eddie never lets him deeply enough into his passion for her.

The ambiguity of Rodolpho's character is symbolised even by his

appearance. His blond hair is incongruous with his Italian origin, his "nice face" and his sense of humour with his background of poverty, his "effeminacy" with his determined struggle in love - complicated, again, by his apologetic submission to Eddie when Marco comes to kill the latter [C.P., p. 437]. He is the kind of character of whom different people might be expected to believe, even imagine, different things. Moreover, he is rather unfortunately foiled by his brother. When Rodolpho claims that his one night singing at La Scala brought the family enough money for the next six months, Marco corrects him that it lasted two months. Where Rodolpho thinks that it was his singing that impressed the listeners, Marco points out that the (predominantly English) audience admired his courage in having taken over at such a short notice from a baritone who was taken ill. [C.P., p. 395]. Marco, a married man with a starving family, cannot but be a realist; Rodolpho suffers by comparison with him, but one cannot altogether blame Eddie for questioning his conduct:

Is that a workin' man? What does he do with his first money?
A snappy new jacket ne buys, records, a pointy pair of new
shoes and his brother's kids are starvin' over there with
tuberculosis? That's a hit and run guy, Baby...

[C.P., p, 403]

Nor can one refute, beyond all doubt, Eddie's claim that Rodolpho's aim in marrying Catherine is an American citizenship, in the face of Rodolpho's refusal to marry her if it entails his return to Italy. Even Eddie's "delusion" that Rodolpho is effeminate or homosexual can at least be understood. His report that the boy has been nicknamed "Paper

Doll" is found to be at least factually correct, for Mike and Louis, the two longshoremen, independently testify to it [C.P., pp. 400-401]. One can only suspect Eddie's interpretation of the fact. For where Marco thinks that men laugh at his brother "because he has a sense of humor," Eddie (not denying the sense of humour) claims: "...but that ain't why they're laughin'." [C.P., p. 408]. Similarly where Beatrice finds him "a nice fella...hard workin', ...good lookin'" [p. 398], and Catherine feels no shame in suggesting that he could earn a living by singing [p. 419], these very qualities - his "nice" face, his singing, cooking, dressmaking - become with Eddie symbols of lack of manhood. In the absence of conclusive evidence on either side Eddie must get at least some benefit of doubt for interpreting Rodolpho's character the way he does.

The challenge that these two characters presents him with pushes Eddie into an extreme position. Even his simple wife who (he owns) has "too big a heart" is a party to the antagonist forces as Eddie sees them. She is the one who, early in the play, presses Catherine's case for employment, and urges her into a mature understanding of her individuality (from Eddie's point of view, shattering her "baby" or "madonna" image). The result has been an estrangement between the husband and wife. The fact that it is "almost three months" since Beatrice hasn't "been his wife" while the cousins have been with them only a "couple of weeks" [C.P., p. 399], shows that the process of Eddie's alienation within the family began, first of all, with his wife.

Marco, ironically, is the one character in the play with whom Eddie ever identifies himself. He stands for Eddie's own values. "Marco," says Eddie with a genuine sense of affirmation, "goes around like a man; nobody kids Marco" [C.P., p. 398]. He is the touchstone of Eddie's moral integrity. He speaks little, but his silence holds out a constant reminder of the law of Eddie's conscience. When Eddie tries to engage Rodolpho in an unequal boxing contest, Marco gently challenges him to lift a chair holding only the end of one leg, which Eddie fails to do, but -

Marco is face to face with Eddie, ...the chair raised like a weapon over Eddie's head - and he transforms what might appear like a glare of warning into a smile ...and Eddie's grin vanishes as he absorbs his look.

[C.P., p. 417].

All these character derive their dramatic significance chiefly in relation to the protagonist, and conspire to shape his destiny. Their coming-together expresses a certain fatality, a condition of environment external to him. But the real tragic inevitability of A View from the Bridge lies, in the last analysis, in the protagonist himself, in his depiction as a man almost possessed and driven beyond the ultimate bound of caution to destruction by an overwhelming force within himself.

This destructive force may be identified as Eddie's neurotic passion for Catherine, but it must not be confused with the playwright's chief pre-occupation. It is not the central theme of the play. The point becomes clear if one recognises the fact that there is a constant, if

imperceptibly fluid, alternation of point of view in the play. (Alfieri is essential⁶⁶ to the play inasmuch as he bridges time - in more than one sense: he emphasises the strong feeling of historical continuity expressed in the primitive passions that make one of the Old World and New; and in a more concrete way, he bridges the time lapses in the action. But his vital contribution, it seems, is that he provides, without becoming at all obtrusive, a balanced vision of the events vis à vis Eddie's obsessed subjective point of view.) The shifting viewpoint, no doubt, helps to indicate the dramatist's larger design, but in concrete terms it helps to focus attention on the protagonist. In the first place, it is intended to help Eddie, but more than that to discover him — to check, for instance, how far he will accept or use the help offered him. For he has already refused such assistance from Beatrice who does all in her power to oppose his neurotic fixation; to his very end she warns him: "The truth is not as bad as blood, Eddie! I'm telling you the truth - tell her good by forever!" [p.438]. But she being an "interested" party her motives are, to Eddie at any rate, suspect. Does he take Alfieri's impartial advice? The first time he visits him he is already quite determined. He tells Alfieri what he thinks about Rodolpho - that the youth "ain't right" ("...you could kiss him ...he's so sweet") and that he is using Catherine for his selfish ends. [C.P.,

⁶⁶ For an opposite view, viz. the narrator is unnecessary and artistically undesirable, see Bentley, Findlater, Hope-Wallace, Popkin, Steinberg.

p. 408]. He wants to know if there is a legal measure he can take to avert the alliance, and Alfieri clearly replies, "You have no recourse in law, Eddie." Meanwhile, the antagonism at home grows more intense and open until Eddie finally plants the hypothetical kiss on Rodolpho's mouth as well as exposing his naked lust for Catherine by kissing her first [C.P., p. 422]. But even then he fails to see his own aberration. Of course, he would still avoid infringing the moral law to which he, along with his society, subscribes - i.e. that he shall not "snitch", so that he simply warns Rodolpho: "Watch your step... By rights you oughta be thrown back into the water. But I got pity for you" [C.P., p. 423]. He calls again on Alfieri [pp. 423-24] and offers him "proof" for his previous claim about the boy's character - he says that Rodolpho did not resist being kissed by him. Alfieri suggests that he probably was not strong enough to loosen his grip. He tries much harder this time to help him understand himself, and advises him strongly to leave the niece alone. Instead, the next moment Eddie is seen in a telephone booth, calling the Immigration Office.

He is simply not the type of person who would settle for half, so that when his struggle to be himself fails, the bridge between the subjective and objective views breaks down and life loses its meaning for him. Knowing perfectly well the fate of an informer in his community, he commits the ultimate act, thereby incurring too a loss of social meaning - killing, as it were, Eddie Carbone as a member of the society. (Marco's justly vengeful insult of him is only a confirmation of this severing of

relationship - no more a surprise than Louis, Mike and the others walking out on him soon after [C.P., p. 433]). His relationship with his society is broken - he has lost his name. He claims that Marco has got his name [C.P., p. 437], but from the objective point of view this is true only inasmuch as Marco represents the values which Eddie accepted but has nonetheless betrayed. The next step - the actual, naturalistic death - is the most logical under the circumstances, for as Raymond Williams observes, "...the loss of meaning in life turns to the struggle for meaning in death."⁶⁷ This renders largely irrelevant the frequent critical question whether incest or informing is the real theme of the play, for they are two aspects of the protagonist's dilemma to preserve his personal integrity (however unacceptable, objectively) and yet maintain the right relationship with his society. The playwright puts forth the case for and against the individual, not only with reference to Eddie but to Marco also, for the latter is as guilty (against objective warning from the lawyer) of violating the "civilized" law that suggests compromise. Both men basically recognise certain social principles, and both find strong cause to obscure this recognition. The motivation is largely personal, but the various social aspects of the situation are not neglected. For instance, it would not be altogether far-fetched to regard Eddie's alleged "inarticulacy" as a reflection of the break-down of communication in our time, for after all

67 "The Realism of Arthur Miller", Critical Quarterly, I (Summer '59), 59

one of the major social questions that A View from the Bridge raises is how our contemporary society fits into the mosaic of world civilisations. There is, of course, the question of the individual guilt, but the destructive force, even more than the guilt, is the failure of a connection between the individual and society. And the common verdict of all the four plays discussed so far seems to be that society in our times makes, not only the struggle, but the very desire for individual self-fulfilment inevitably tragic. The only other alternative suggested so far - to "settle for half", that is, to strike a compromise between the liberal (or liberating) and the self-preservative impulses of the individual - is equally tragic since it presumes a negation of the free self, a surrender of the "name". None of the protagonists has accepted it and, when he has failed in life to resist this demand by society, he has challenged it bitterly in death.

AFTER THE FALL (1965) is the first of Miller's published plays in which the individual really comes to terms with society in life, although, as the title suggests, the life that the hero accepts is a life devoid of innocence, and therefore again tragic. The unusually loose structure and the form of the play do not allow of the usual plot-summary, but - at the risk of doing great violence to the organic form of it, one might crudely describe the official facts of the autobiography of the central character, in the "chronological" order rather than in the order of associations where they properly belong.

A young girl with ambitions to a formal education is paired off with a totally illiterate man of her parents' choice. Out of the fatal union are born two sons, Dan and Quentin. In the latter, who is the protagonist-chorus-consciousness of the play, the mother wishes to see the fulfilment of her dream of college education. But, in an economic crash in 1929, the father loses his last asset, his money (and along with it the little respect that his good looks have inspired in his wife), and wants to rebuild his business with the help of his sons. Dan decides to join with his father, but Quentin, too strongly under his mother's influence, refuses to surrender his plans and goes, instead, to law school. Quentin's mother dies, and is deeply mourned by her husband whom she always regarded as no more than a "moron" and an "idiot". Quentin makes the intimate friendship of one of his professors, Lou, whose wife, Elsie, is a shrew - prepared to betray the professor with Quentin. Lou is also involved in political charges for his leftist activities during the 'thirties, and when a friend, Mickey, similarly summoned before an investigating committee stoops to naming names, and urges Lou to do likewise, the latter commits suicide. Quentin becomes a lawyer and marries his first wife, Louise. The woman, herself cold in bed according to Quentin, complains that Quentin is too deeply attached to his mother's image to love his wife as wife. She refuses to play the adoring mother which she thinks Quentin wants her to. Driven by Louise's threats of a divorce, Quentin goes to bed with another woman, Maggie - but once - and admits it to his wife, but three years later the marriage

breaks. Quentin's relationship with Maggie develops. An uneducated girl, having had a childhood devoid of love, Maggie has been trying to fill her emotional vacuum with a series of equally vacuous sexual experiences. However, her uninhibited openness to experience, her simple indulgence in life of the moment, as against his own intellectual and cautious approach to life, attracts Quentin, although he assumes an attitude of protectiveness toward her. They marry, and Maggie becomes a famous pop singer, but her sense of insecurity never leaves her. She begins to rely more and more on alcohol and sleeping pills, and moves farther and farther away from Quentin, often blaming him (like Louise) of "coldness". Quentin himself begins partly to share her doubts about him, though he is not prepared to assume the total responsibility for his "guilt". After a bitter argument, Maggie swallows a number of her pills in order to shift the guilt for her self-destruction onto Quentin. Possessed by a neurotic frenzy in which he sees in Maggie the image of his mother (for whom he suddenly perceives a latent hatred), Quentin tries to strangle her, and thus precipitates the inevitable end of the marriage. Maggie, however, fulfils her threat of suicide afterwards. Quentin, in the meanwhile, gets friendly with a former client (probably his last, for after Maggie's death he winds up his flourishing New York practice), a woman called Felice for whom he handled a divorce suit. What she considers his interest in her future elicits Felice's admiration for Quentin, but the relationship proves no more than an interlude. For next on the ruins of Quentin's marriages appears a German archaeologist,

Holga, who has survived the Hitler era and is prepared to struggle to live despite the "complicity" she feels in what happened in her country. She seems, therefore, to understand Quentin's guilt, and is drawn to him by a common past. At this point, Quentin has "a bit of a decision to take" - whether after two broken marriages he has the right to take upon himself the burden of a third.

"The action" of the play "takes place in the mind, thought and memory of Quentin" [After the Fall,⁶⁸ p. 11]. This may recall the "dream" scenes in Death of a Salesman, in fact, Miller's original idea of the "inside of his head" is literally put into action here; but where the salesman dreams, Quentin searches for definition. Where Willy evades, Quentin would seek out even what destroys him. Whereas in the earlier plays it is someone other than the hero who is endowed with the authorial detachment - Chris in Sons, Biff in Salesman, Alfieri in View - in After the Fall the subjective and the objective truths are blended in the central character himself. The critical complaint against A View from the Bridge was that although Eddie satisfied Miller's criteria in that he "allowed himself to be wholly known" he never knew himself. In Quentin Miller has created a character who, by his very nature (no less than the nature of his profession) simply cannot escape the "whole truth" about himself. As a result, the "bit of decision" that he has to take must be

68 Page references are to the London edition published by Secker and Warburg, 1965. The title of the play is abbreviated in subsequent references as Fall

taken in the light of his total experience - past and present. The play becomes, then, a ruthless search into the dark crevices of the past for the source of Quentin's failure in love. The search, it must be emphasised, is not merely a process of psychoanalytical introspection, but is related to a wider area of causation - of social, cultural and historical experience. "The setting," says Miller, "consists of three [though at least the British production - Belgrade, Coventry - employed several] levels rising to the highest at the back..." This may be taken to represent various levels of the protagonist's consciousness; or, the personal, domestic and social levels on which the experience is to be enacted. The loss of innocence, the failure of love, takes place at all these.

Quentin's parents' marriage is a violation of the innocence of his mother, and a failure of love for the father. She attributes it to destiny:

MOTHER: The first time I felt you move I was standing on the beach at Rockway... And I saw a star, and it got bright, and brighter, and brighter! And suddenly it fell, like some great man had died, and you were being pulled out of me to take his place, and be a light, a light in the world!

[Fall, pp 78-79]

but her explanation can only be regarded as a subjective rationalisation of her lack of love, for "the great man" who, according to her, "died" remained very much alive save in her affections.

The pattern is repeated in Quentin's own marriages. Like his mother Louise gave up her hopes (along with her Bacteriological studies) in order to marry him. She has further cause for dissatisfaction in that Quentin is frequently tempted into infidelity, and at least once succumbs to the temptation. This is an obvious failure on his part. But, on the

other hand he justly feels abused since Louise has never appreciated his sincerity. He admits that he had wanted to betray her with Maggie, but "...I didn't because I thought of you, and in a new way - like a stranger I had never gotten to know. And by some miracle you were waiting for me, in my own home." [Fall, p. 68]. When he does commit adultery, he leaves "that letter for you to read - in order somehow to start being real" [Fall, p. 67], but this "reality" of Quentin is precisely what eludes Louise.

LOUISE: What do you want, my congratulations? You don't imagine that...a real man goes to bed with every woman who'll have him?

[Fall, p. 68]

His marriage with Maggie arouses a hope. Here is a lonely being without any real identity:

...if I went to Washington...I could register in the hotel as Miss None. ...I made it up once 'cause I can never remember a fake name, so I just have to think of nothing and that's me. (She laughs with joy).

[Fall, p. 90]

She lost her identity when her father deserted her mother. She was only eighteen months old then [Fall, p. 84], and she has spent her life seeking a father-figure. When she did find her own father (and hoped he would hold her in his arms as if she were a baby) he refused to recognise her. In Quentin for the first time she finds this lost idol, for the other men she has known, who might have provided this psychological need of hers, (for instance, the elderly judge she lived with), took her as no more than an outlet for their sex.

My [psycho-] analyst says I used to think it was like charity - sex. Like I give to those in need. Whereas, I'm not an institution.

[Fall, pp. 92-93]

She feels no guilt in confessing, almost warning Quentin innocently, on their wedding day: "I...was...with two men...the same day...I mean the same day, see," [Fall, p. 100], and even hopes "Maybe...it would even make me a better wife..." [Fall, p. 101]. But her promiscuity, far from putting him off, inspires in Quentin a strange sense of "power" [p. 80], although he knows her to be no more than a "joke". Of course, he realises before long that the power is unreal, and that he was playing the "cheap benefactor" to her; that he could not sleep with her "without a principle" - the principle that "she had to be 'saved'" [Fall, p. 95]. He spares no pains to ensure her professional advancement - spends "forty per cent" of his time on her problems [Fall, p. 108] - and this inspires her absolute trust in him. But trust lays a heavy burden of responsibility - including the responsibility to urge the truth on her. However, he has to protect her even from the truth.

But how can you speak of love, she had been chewed and spat out by a long line of grinning men! Her name floating in the stench of the locker rooms and parlor-car cigar smoke! She had the truth that day I brought the lie that she had to be 'saved'! From what? Except my own contempt!

[Fall, p. 95]

The guilt is double-edged: Maggie senses that Quentin is ashamed of her, and he has to admit that though not "ashamed" he is "afraid": "I wasn't sure if any of them had had you." [Fall, p. 122]. Her past tells upon him and his upon her, and it becomes increasingly difficult to live in

the present entirely, which was the great hope that the marriage had originally aroused, for Maggie represented the "now" that held a kind of charm for Quentin. The past menaces them in more ways than one. Maggie wants not to be mixed up with Louise [Fall, p. 123], but, says Quentin, "That's just it. That I could have brought two women so different to the same accusation" [Ibid.]. Her alcoholic neuroticism blinds her to all his efforts on her behalf. She transgresses into childhood, and the father idol, as it were, deserts her, while the other - equally ruthless - parent takes over. She yearns for her mother [Fall, p. 119], the mother who "tried to kill me...with a pillow on my face, whereas... I would turn out bad because of her...like her sin. And I have her hair, and the same back." [Fall, p. 86]. It is Quentin again who fits this image symbolically by choking Maggie and thus repeating what the mother had done. There is a double irony here, for in trying to efface an image from his own past (the face of his mother that his hallucination superimposes on Maggie's) Quentin is really reviving Maggie's past which, altogether, is an even greater threat to him than to her. Maggie's several attempts at suicide pinpoint Quentin's past guilt in his own similar attempt as a child. The light, then, which this marriage appeared to shed on these dark lives - that it might reillumine a lost innocence - proves no more than a delusion.

Marriages, however, are seldom made in heaven, but what about the boundless love that the parental star is supposed to have shed on Quentin? Despite his mother's vision of the son as a "light in the world" [Fall,

p.89-], the boy Quentin experiences a betrayal of the promised maternal affection when she goes away with his father on their trip to Atlantic City, leaving the son all alone at home - nearly driving him to suicide [Fall, p. 88]: "God, why is betrayal the only truth that sticks? I adored that woman." [p. 89]. The resentment may appear childish but no more childish than to expect adult behaviour from a child. The point also is that his attempted suicide was itself an expression of murder, for as he now sees it, "A suicide kills two people, Maggie. That's what it's for." [Fall, p. 118].

Maggie's suicide must then be regarded in a similar light. Louise's refusal to seek self-knowledge and own her share of the guilt for the disintegration of the marriage is equally destructive. Quentin must accept some responsibility for having betrayed his father at the time of a financial crisis for the family, though the father stands guilty of having voted in an election almost in his mourning suit. Elsie's attempt to seduce Quentin, Felice's divorce are failures of love. Lou's betrayal of his pupils with his lies about Russia is far outweighed by Quentin's grateful relief at his death which frees Quentin from any involvement in his friend's problems. Mickey's guilt unto his friends and in "naming names" before the House Committee is but a fraction of the moral failure of the society that asks such questions of the individual. Even Holga, the "hope" element in the drama, is there at least partly in order to link Quentin's family, his marriages and his friends with the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps - a total manifestation of the inhumanity of man

Its towering presence dominates all levels of "the mind, thought and memory" of man. It is there, not so much as an inert documentation of his past, nor even as a reminder that history might repeat itself, but as a tragic living symbol of the violence of our own times, a mirror, or a gauge along which the rising tides of self-destruction in the "living" individual and contemporary society might register their watermark. Quentin, who (in accepting his responsibility for Maggie's death [Fall, p. 76]) has faced the truth that every time he stands aside and lets murder take place he becomes an accomplice, realises, on visiting the tower, that he does not feel as much horror as he expected to. For he recognises that he himself has partaken of this bloodlust - if in much less drastic ways. He needs little more proof of this but Holga's words clinch the issue.

QUENTIN: Do you feel when you come here ... some vague complicity?

HOLGA: Quentin...no one they didn't kill can be innocent again.

[Fall, p.]

This threefold condemnation of the individual, family and society may see new in Miller's work, but it is not. Nor does it imply a vision of absolute, unrelieved darkness. For hope enters the gloomy panorama in the person of Holga, through whom battered Quentin grasps at the only scarp of tattered certainty.

HOLGA: I had the same dream each night - that I had a child; and even in a dream I saw the child was my life; and it was an idiot. And I wept, and a hundred times I ran away, but each time I came back it had the same dreadful face. Until I thought I could kiss it, whatever in it was my own, perhaps I could rest. And I bent to

its broken face, and it was horrible...but I kissed it.
 QUENTIN: Does it still come back?
 HOLGA: At times. But it somehow has the virtue now...of
 being mine. I think one must finally take one's life
 in one's arms, Quentin. [Fall, p.]

One must, in Quentin's words, "see [one's] hatred and live!"

To know and even happily that we meet unblessed; not in
 some garden of wax fruit and painted trees, that lie of
 Eden, but after, after the Fall, after many many deaths.
 And...the wish to kill is never killed, but with some
 gift of courage one might look into its face when it
 appears, and with a stroke of love - as to an idiot in
 the house - forgive it; again and again...forever?

It is this hope that is new in After the Fall, not the gloom. But it is
 a tragic hope, to be sure, for although Quentin strikes the compromise
 that Willy or Eddie fails to make, and he achieves the self-knowledge
 for lack of which Willy and Eddie suffer, the very achievement is the
 source of tragedy in After the Fall. For self-knowledge now implies a
 realisation of the identity between social evil and individual desire,
 which renders the individual incapable of opposing, either in life or
 through death, the other-ness of society which might threaten his self-
 hood. It "has simply to be confirmed, forgiven and lived with, in our
 separate and isolated suffering."⁶⁹

69 Raymond Williams, Modern Tragedy, p. 105

AN identity between the larger social evil and individual desire is, indeed, at the root of the thematic tree in Incident at Vichy (1965), a 90-100 minute Shavian talk in a single act, Miller's last work to be published so far, and second last to be performed. Miller sees in each one of us the responsibility for the evil, violence and war that menace our world, but within this seemingly nihilistic framework, the human triumph or hope is represented by an act of courage and love.

A play depicting how the Nazis got the Jews for the Auschwitz furnaces must ensure a degree of horror and rage, as well as deep pity. As a Jew himself, Miller might have been expected to take the issue to the stage once some of the facts began to emerge. His novel, Focus, had had anti-Semitism as at least a surface layer of the theme. But Incident at Vichy is neither the melodrama that its subject matter might suggest, nor is it a Shylockian "If-you-prick-us-do-we-not-bleed?" plea on behalf of the Jews that a narrow-minded recognition of the playwright's identity might have led some people to anticipate.

The time of the "action" is September, 1942. Ten frightened "suspects" have been picked up by the police on the streets of Vichy in Petain's "unoccupied" France and as the curtain goes up, they are seen huddled together on a bench-and-a-half in a "place of detention" awaiting examination in an office at the back by a "racial anthropologist". At first they do not know why they have been arrested, or rather they do not want to admit to themselves - that it is because they are all, except one, Jews. As time goes by, and those who enter the "office" one by one, do

not re-emerge, the rest of them begin to face the truth. When the only Gentile, an Austrian aristocrat "Prince" Von Berg, goes in, there is one last Jew, a French Army psychiatrist called Leduc, awaiting his turn. When the Prince returns, he quickly puts a "pass" he has been issued into Leduc's hand and asks him to run. It would only be fair to state that this act of sacrifice - which Dickens' Sidney Carton performed in fiction - was, in Vichy, performed in life, and the real Leduc is known to Arthur Miller:

.....The friend of my friend [wrote Mr. Miller in The New York Times Magazine] was a Jew. As he got closer and closer to the fatal door, he became more and more certain that his death was near. Presently this last man was ordered into the office. Nothing stood between the Jew and a meaningless abrupt slaughter. The man who had been the last to go in came out. My friend's friend stood paralysed, waiting for the policeman to appear and beckon him into the office. But instead of walking past him with his pass to freedom, the Gentile who had come out stopped in front of my friend's friend, thrust his pass into his hand, and whispered for him to go. He went ... He had never before laid eyes on his savior. He never saw him again...⁷⁰

This is both the factual basis and climactic ending of the play. Apart from that there is little "action" - except a single attempt at escape by Leduc, thwarted by lack of co-operation; and although he manages to get a fifteen-year old boy out of the trap, even he is caught at once. For the rest, talk itself is the action.

The participants in the symposium represent a true spectrum of human illusions and fears, and as they wait for their last exit into the interrogation room

70 Miller, "Our Guilt for the World's Evil", New York Times Magazine, January 3, 1965, p. 10

in stances of victimisation, evasion, cowardice, defiance...they finally reveal themselves.

Amid the shuffling, restive, incredulous group, however, there is one — Marchand, "a fairly well-dressed businessman, keeps glancing at his watch and bits of paper and calling cards...and seems normally impatient" [Vichy, p. 11]; he is "connected to the food supply" [p.22]; for him it is merely "a routine check" of personal documents, and he is only concerned about the waste involved in engaging so much personnel in the operation when "...they could easily have put a notice in the paper — everyone would have come here to present his documents" [p.18], and he is at most "embarrassed". He seems confident that his ministerial contacts will ensure his release, and they do. The others are not so confident. Lebeau, a hungry painter suspects "some racial...implications." [p. 15]. However, Monceau, a Parisian actor, continues, to sustain the hopeful delusion: "Vichy," he says, "must be full of counterfeit papers. I think as soon as they start, it shouldn't take long..." [p. 18]. But the recurrent appearance of a German officer keeps arousing apprehensions, even though a young waiter among the victims declares:

I serve him breakfast every morning. Tell you the truth, he's really not a bad fellow. Regular army, see, not one of these S.S. bums. Got wounded somewhere, so they stuck him back here..... He even comes at night sometimes, plays a beautiful piano. Gives himself French lessons out of a book...."

[pp.22-23]

Evidently, his delusion springs from his confidence in this previous acquaintance. Amid some talk of whether or not they measured the business

man's nose, a detective Captain is overheard giving instructions regarding further arrests: "Try to avoid taking anybody out of a crowd....," he says [p. 25], as a subordinate hurls in three more captives - the Prince, the psychiatrist, and a poor aging person, identifiably Jewish, carrying a bagful of feathers. This dispels any delusions, for the old man (though he remains silent throughout - too feeble, perhaps, to talk), he symbolises them as well as the play. Another symbolic character is a Gypsy - the "alien" among the aliens. There are, too, among the captives, Bayard, a marxist electrician who works in the railways, and a 15-year old boy who has been caught while going to a pawn-shop with his starving mother's wedding ring. The former trusts in the working-class solidarity for his release, the latter in his minority. Both are mistaken. Amid some further philosophising of the situation, desperation mounts high as facts begin to dawn on the group.

BAYARD, to the others: I work in the railroad yards. A thirty-car freight train pulled in yesterday. The engineer is Polish, so I couldn't talk to him, but one of the switchmen says he heard people inside... It came from Toulouse. I heard there's been a quiet roundup of Jews in Toulouse the last couple of weeks. And what's a Polish engineer doing on a train in Southern France? You understand?

LEDUC: Concentration camps?

.....
BAYARD:(quietly): The cars are locked on the outside...And they stink. You can smell the stench a hundred yards away. Babies are crying inside. You can hear them. And women. They don't lock volunteers [by which he means forced labour, which is what Monceau believes they are collecting] in that way....

[p. 28]

And before long he arms himself with the necessary weapon, forged out of the gypsy's pan, to unlock a door from within if the inevitable does

happen [p. 30]. The waiter confirms Bayard's apprehensions by recounting what someone has told him: "People get burned up in furnaces. It's not to work. They burn you up in Poland... (in a loud whisper) they're going to look at your penis" [p. 50].

Exposition is over. Now for the action. Leduc, of the whole company, seems to be the one to promise this. A hint of his character is inherent in his very entrance as he announces himself in the play's first clash with the persecuting authority, whose cold-blooded procedure is equally obvious. SECOND DETECTIVE, to Leduc: "Don't give me any more trouble now."

(The door opens and the Major enters. Instantly Leduc is on his feet, approaching the Major.)

LEDUC: Sir, I must ask the reason for this. I am a combat officer of the French army. There is no authority to arrest me in French territory. The Occupation has not revoked French law in Southern France.

(The Second Detective, infuriated, throws Leduc back into his seat. He returns to the Professor.)

SECOND DETECTIVE, to Major, of Leduc: Speechmaker.

PROFESSOR, doubtfully: You think you two can carry on now?

[pp.23-24]

However, he does finally suggest an escape, only to find his companions unwilling. Von Berg apologises, "I'm afraid, I'd only get in your way. I have no strength in my hands;" Monceau is still unwilling to face the truth:

But what good are dead Jews to them? They want free labour. It's senseless. You can say whatever you like but the Germans are not illogical; there's no conceivable advantage for them in such a thing....an attrocity like that is beyond my belief.

[p. 52]

Of the rest, the starved painter Lebeau - "weak as a chicken" [p. 59] - and the boy agree to join Leduc in his break-out, but he has, in the

meanwhile, witnessed once again the iron hand of the executioner in a threatening refusal with which the Major's request for a ten-minute leave from duty has been met: "The Army's responsibility," cries the anthropologist, "is as great as mine here" [p. 58], and Leduc himself changes his mind. Lebeau, he says, is "weak with hunger, and the boy's like a feather. I wanted to get away, not just slaughtered...I'm afraid I came in here with the wrong assumptions" [p. 64]. Even so, when the boy makes a dash, he follows him, but they are intercepted by the Major. From this point on, we part company with "action" - performed or contemplated, except for Von Berg's final act. The drama arises from what was described above as "talk".

Criticism of Incident at Vichy, both in America and England, has comprised an active effort to "ignore" the play on two grounds: on the one hand, it has been regarded as too "abstract" as a play; and, on the other, as melodramatic. Several London critics were at pains to prove how melodramatic the action of the play was. There is some justification for both the charges. Watching Peter Wood's production at the Phoenix, one did tend to get a feeling of fatigue at the discussion that precedes the unsuccessful escape. But this bit of activity not only enlivened the essentially frozen scene, but gave a sudden jerk, too, to the mental inertia that the foregoing "talk" had appeared to induce. It must be argued, too, that the action in itself, as action, is perfectly natural. Somebody among a group of men in a crisis is bound to make the effort, and it is quite consistent with Leduc's character in view of the

defiance he has displayed earlier, and with the boy's who is unaware of the full implications and consequences of it and is, moreover, goaded into the attempt by an adult in common crisis. The action serves as a yardstick for the reactions of the other characters, who, knowing that the alternative to the risk involved in an effort to escape is certain death, are unwilling even to make the effort. But Miller would never be content with so facile a "thesis", and the real function he makes this seemingly melodramatic action serve in the structure of the play is to quicken the intellectual intercourse. Leduc, once unsuccessful, is much more desperate to understand the nature of the evil confronting them, and he drags everyone into the analysis. Purely as a dramatic device, the episode helps in the growth of the two major characters; and thematically, it gives a forward thrust to the exploration in which the play is engaged.

Leduc has so far been cynically amused with the answers of his fellows. Lebeau, "utterly confused", evades responsibility by refusing that anything has significance - an extension into life of his aesthetic "art must not mean but be" [p. 16]; he is indifferent to reality and fails completely to face it - in art as well as in life - "You get tired of believing in the truth...tired of seeing things clearly...I could never paint what I saw, only what I imagined" [p. 67]. (Miller's lack of sympathy for this character is obvious from the reasons he puts into his mouth for the imminent catastrophe: that all this happened because his mother did not emigrate to America. [p. 67])).

Monceau's position, likewise, has only "amused" Leduc. For he is quite as deluded about the nature of reality as the painter. "Everyone said I was crazy to stay in the [theatre] but I did and I imposed my idea on others" [p. 65]. Believing guilt to be subjective he maintains that if you go to your inquisition like a guilty man you will be found guilty, but if you put on a mien of serene innocence it is bound to get you acquitted. Confusing the detention room for a stage he fails likewise to see the true nature of Nazism. "The Germans are not illogical ..." [op. cit.] He is not only mistaken about the illogical nature of evil but also about law in a world where the basic assumptions of humanity are not valid any more. Leduc agrees with him that their one hope is not to play the role the executioners have written for them, but he cannot make him see that to play his role convincingly he must be prepared to die in and for it: it is the one he has really chosen. As he prepares with self-conscious courage and theatrical display of elegance to throw his scarf gracefully round his neck - a symbolic protection for the neck, as it were - and utters his final "Mon panache," the doctor pronounces his verdict on him: "Your heart is conquered territory, Mister." [p. 69].

Bayard, the red "worker", extremely conscious of the evils of capitalism and bourgeoisie, is in fact as romantic as the two artists. He cannot admit the human capacity for evil: to him the Germans are bad only because they are fascists. The individual position as regards good as well as evil is irrelevant to him. "You can't make sense on a

personal basis" [p. 45]"..Is any of us an individual to them? Class interest makes history, not individuals" [p. 47]; for him the only reality lies in "the future. In the day when the working class is master of the world. That's my confidence... (To Monceau) Not some borrowed personality." [p. 46] And with these for his facts he is convinced, "A human being has to glory in the facts" [p. 47].

Leduc, the "investigator" in the play, or as Sheila Huftel describes him, "the Miller character", is not satisfied with these denials of the horrible situation. Nonetheless, these lame excuses do make their point: the unwillingness of the individual to establish an identity of his own, out of register with the evil he sees in the world; his complicity in his own destruction, his "death wish", if you like.

From the moment of Leduc's failure to escape, however, a much more fundamental question comes to the surface. His questioning now is as desperate as his situation. The Major stops him, and -

MAJOR: Don't try it. There are sentries on both corners.

(Glancing toward the office door): Captain, I would only like to say that ... this is all as inconceivable to me as it is to you. Can you believe that?

LEDUC: I'd believe it if you shot yourself. And better yet if you took a few of them with you.

MAJ:..... (with a maniac amusement, yet deeply questioning): Why do you deserve to live more than I do? ...It means nothing to you that I have feelings about this?

LED: Nothing whatever unless you get us out of here...I will remember a decent German, an honourable German...

MAJ: That means so much to you... It's amazing; you don't understand anything. Nothing of that kind is left, don't you understand that yet? ... (more loudly, a fury rising in him): There are no persons any more...

[Vichy, pp. 70-71]

Leduc's own stance of moral superiority to the Nazi is gradually breaking

and he comes, for a while, into line with the rest in a passive acceptance of his role as a victim. The self-destructive complicity is complete.

However, his altercation with the Major helps bring up the argument initiated by Von Berg that the Nazis have created a new definition for man. It is the ensuing, continued interaction between the two characters that represents a really positive effort to understand why these crimes are committed, and from it, too, that any semblance of a solution to the thematic problem emerges. The point is marked by the Old Jew's exit offstage for interrogation, when he refuses to leave behind his bag: the police suspect some treasure, but in the struggle, the sack explodes into feathers, a shock, too, for the two principals - a theatrical shock of recognition and acceptance of responsibility:

VON BERG: There is nothing, is that it? For you there is nothing?

.....
LE DUC: Prince, in my profession one gets the habit of looking at people quite impersonally. It is not you I am angry with. In one part of my mind it is not even this Nazi. I am only angry that I should have been born before the day when man has accepted his own nature: that he is not reasonable, that he is full of murder, that his ideals are only a little tax he pays for the right to hate and kill with a clear conscience. I am only angry that, knowing this, I still deluded myself. That there was not time to truly make part of myself what I know, and to teach others the truth.

VON BERG (angered, above his anxiety): There are ideals, Doctor, of another kind. There are people who would find it easier to die than stain one finger with this murder. They exist. I swear to you. People for whom everything is not permitted, foolish people and ineffectual, but they do exist and will not dishonour their tradition. (Desparately): I ask your friendship.

LEDUC: I owe you the truth, Prince; you won't believe it now. But I wish you would think about it and what it means. I have never analysed a gentile who did not have somewhere hidden in his mind, a dislike if not hatred for the Jews.

VON BERG: That is impossible; it is not true of me.

LEDUC: Until you know it is true of you, you will destroy whatever truth can come of this atrocity. Part of knowing who we are is knowing we are not someone else. And Jew is only the name we give to the stranger, that agony we cannot feel, that death we look at like a cold abstraction. And the Jews have their Jews. And now, now above all, you must see that you have yours - the man whose death leaves you relieved that you are not him, despite your decency. And that is why there is nothing and will be nothing - until you face your own complicity with this ... your own humanity.

[Vichy, pp. 82-84]

Neither Von Berg's denial nor his plea that he had attempted suicide when the Nazis murdered the Jewish musicians in his private orchestra is acceptable proof of his humanity. Leduc reminds him that his cousin Baron Kessler (whom Leduc had known at the medical school in Vienna) was not the "democrat" that the Prince makes him out to be, but a vicious Nazi who had helped to remove all the Jewish doctors from the school. He gives a final thrust to the process of recognition:

Yes, if you understand that Baron Kessler was, in part, in some small and frightful part - doing your will. You might have done something then, with your standing and your name and your decency, aside from shooting yourself! [p. 86]

Through the "external" conflict, that is the one between the two characters, arises an internal conflict in Von Berg, which results in his final acceptance of what Leduc demands of him: his "responsibility", not his "guilt". Von Berg moves, in the course of the debate, from a detached sympathy but essential irresponsibility for the Nazi evil through a revelation that he had deceived himself about his complicity, to a position of responsibility even unto death for the evil represented by the place of detention. But, at the same time, Leduc moves, too, from his earlier superiority, through his cynicism, to a final shattering of the superiority into a rebirth of

his belief in the human potentiality for good. When Von Berg comes out of the office with his "pass to freedom" in his hand, he does not hesitate. As he hands the pass to Leduc:

Leduc backs away, his hands springing to cover his eyes in the awareness of his own guilt.

LEDUC:(a plea in his voice): I wasn't asking you to do that!

Yet, "his eyes wide in awe and terror," he runs away. In his flight, he proves himself another accomplice to the crime, because soon after his exit four new captives are brought in as Von Berg and the Major face each other, "forever incomprehensible to each other." Evil is not dead in society as it still survives in the individual.

Miller's theme, man's inhumanity to man, is not confined to the Auschwitz proceedings only: "I wasn't really concerned with the Jews or Nazis," he said. [NY Times, op. cit.] Incident at Vichy is a phoenix risen from the ashes of The Crucible, but thirteen years have brought a considerable increase of power and economy: the bigots of Salem are replaced by impersonal police officers carrying out duties all in a day's work, and a certain mawkishness in the Rev. Hale has vanished from the German Major, whose doubts and irresolutions are compounded by the pain in his leg and the feeling that the whole business is demeaning for an officer of the line. The two major characters are marked by an ambiguity and a development which intensifies the dramatic conflict and lends a good deal of power to the seemingly neatest of Miller's plays. For its technical excellence, if not for a corresponding depth of ideas, Incident at Vichy will remain a great minor play by a major playwright.

ii

FOR a playwright primarily concerned with ideas, Arthur Miller has shown an enormous concern with form. His Introduction to the Collected Plays is one of the major documents of modern dramatic theory. Numerous other articles, speeches, broadcasts throw a flood of light not only on Miller's own dramatic practice but some of the most relevant stylistic issues in the contemporary theatre at large. Perhaps his most daring utterances have been those on the nature of tragedy in the modern times. Contrary to the common assumption that in times of crisis, like ours, tragedy not only cannot be written but cannot be understood either, Miller published a carefully argued case for "Tragedy and the Common Man" [New York Times, February 27, 1949], reinterpreting the traditional view. For the common man, Miller argues, is as proper a subject for tragedy as a king. Stature, he points out, is not to be equated with status. Whether the hero be king or commoner, "the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing - his sense of personal dignity." The tragic struggle is one of a man attempting to assert his place in the sun and to affirm his importance, whether for the first time or to recapture something once possessed and lost. Few will rebel in such a manner, and we, the passive onlookers, are struck with pity and fear because we so far identify ourselves with the protagonist as to be afraid of being "torn away from our

chosen image of what and who we are in this world." [Ibid.]. Some kind of enlightenment or revelation, Miller maintains, is essential, otherwise we are left with mere pathos, the meaningless destruction of an unconscious animal. In our day and age, Miller continues, tragedy is not possible if our view of life is a completely psychiatric or sociological - the one points that our indignities are all internal and thus invalidates external action; the other so far shifts our interest from individual to mass man that the tragedy of one is unbelievable and irrelevant. Miller agrees that tragedy is essentially optimistic, and dwells on the distinction between tragedy and pathos in any age. All this, he reminds us, is true of the king as of the common man, and since we no longer believe in the former, the latter is the only suitable subject for tragedy in our time.

Visualising the drama as a public art, a communal activity, in a democracy as much as a monarchy, in an age devoid of "heroes" as well as one dominated by hero-worship, Miller's approach to the art of playwriting embodies a keen sense of the audience as persons to be addressed and not merely as spectators to be tolerated. The "Introduction" reveals a highly critical (and self-critical) artist struggling to understand his medium, and to perfect it to suit his ambitious concept of drama. To be able to express ideas successfully, to assert human dignity in times when it is most questioned, the playwright must achieve the sense, not only of the audience's identity with the characters and situation represented in the play, but an active sense of participation. These aims have a great

deal to do with the form that Miller has employed in his plays, a form, let us remind ourselves, which has varied from play to play so as to be organic with the intellectual materials that were being articulated.

Although Miller excluded the purely "psychological" drama from the "mainstream" of drama, this must not be mistaken to mean that he rejects a psychological understanding of the dramatis personae: psychology, in fact, is a very vital part of the total structure of a Miller play, but as has been suggested in the discussion of various plays, there is an unceasing effort to relate individual psychology to social causation, and to the final image of society that results from it.

Miller's early works already indicate this fusion of serious concern about the nature of society with a sound portrayal of its members, and even his latest works are deeply linked, as regards experience, with such curiosities as The Man Who Had All the Luck. What has undergone almost a transformation is the body he gives to this synthesis. All My Sons and Death of a Salesman are both supposed to have grown out of the earlier play, yet it is interesting to compare the method in the two plays to form some idea of the restless experimentation to which the playwright has been devoted. All My Sons is a tightly constructed, three-act play. Its form, as Miller says,

is a reflection and expression of several forces. I desired above all to write rationally... if there is any one word to name the mood I felt it was Forego. Let nothing interfere with the shape, the direction, the intention... My intention was to be as untheatrical as possible.

[C.P., pp. 15-19]

It is often described as an Ibsenesque play: at least one notice of its

first production was entitled "Henrik Miller", and perhaps with some justification. The stylistic features most reminiscent of Ibsen are: the "well-made" structure; the retrospective method - always, with Ibsen as well as Miller, something more than a mere expository device, it is rather a means of a thematic forcing of past into present; and the "fatal secret" - Joe Keller's social crime parallel to, say, Consul Bernick's in The Pillars of Society. The time-sequence of the play covers less than 24 hours: the curtain rises upon an "early Sunday morning"; Act Two opens "that evening"; and Act three begins at "2 o'clock the following morning." There is a single setting: the backyard of the Keller home "in the outskirts of an American town." Action proceeds along a single line, but under the definite stress of the double focus of past events and present, to a final culmination, a climactic explosion. The opening act sets the stage for the action in Acts Two and Three: attention is focussed on Keller as a successful businessman, "devoted" husband and father, friendly neighbour, but also a simple but shrewd man in his middle age. That he has "something to hide" is apparent, too, not only in his dialogue with Kate, but in the nuances of all his speeches. Ann's announcement that she has stopped waiting for Larry gives a touch of inevitability to the impending disaster in view of Kate's refusal to acknowledge his death. Act Two precipitates the conflict, arising out of George's arrival. The past begins to tell upon the present much more intensely. Chris's pangs of conscience promise a severe dealing of justice to the guilty, and presently he begins to force his father to stop glossing the past. The father's

pleas for his position early in the final act reveal that a conflict of consuming fury is already rising within him. The various characters begin to line up for or against him: the courtroom is here and the verdict is unavoidable.

Despite the "tight" structure of All My Sons, and despite Miller's retrospective claims to a rigorous economy imposed upon its execution, however, there is labouring of inconsequential detail and inessential byplay in the earlier acts which Miller seems to have recognised by the time he came to write *Death of a Salesman*. Certain symbolic and expressionist elements, on the other hand, which failed completely to be effective in Sons form the backbone of the structure in Salesman. Briefly, one might mention the artificial imposition of a sense of Fate, embodied in the unharmonised business about the horoscope, and the utterly discordant symbol of the tree representing Larry.

In Death of a Salesman one is at once struck by a complexity of organisation not to be associated with either All My Sons or even with the average concept of dramatic literature. Miller was perfectly aware of the still imperfect manipulation of time, the telescoping of past into present despite the considerable achievement represented by Sons. In his "Introduction", he acknowledges it as "the biggest single problem...how to dramatise what has gone before" [C.P., p. 21]. In Salesman, there is such close co-existence of past and present that it takes a few viewings or readings before one realises that there are exactly twenty-four time-sequences within the ninety pages of the printed text. To summarise these

or to attempt to relate them to one-another would be like preparing a prompt copy of the play. But, briefly, there are three main time-sequences: the "present" time, that is the action moves forward in present time without reference to the "return of the repressed" in Willy's mind. Here the point of view is wholly subjective. Secondly, there is "past" time, where, although the action remains in the present (this is not a flashback), we are wholly inside Willy's mind, viewing his imaginative reconstruction of the past; thirdly there is simultaneity, that is, the action remains in the present but we are not wholly inside Willy's mind, for there is both objective reference to other characters and subjective projection by Willy: the point of view is subjective-objective. Movement results from progressive causal logic in the "present" interwoven with the mental reconstruction by Willy of his past, and the juxtaposing - and at times the fusing - of the two patterns that constitutes the structure of the play. A serious, and successful, effort has been made to integrate it around key-scenes, each of which is designed to build toward the final climax of the play. Exposition is continual and always relevant to action and theme, and the time-sequences reveal an amazing number of preparations for the coming events. There is not a moment in the play when focus on the protagonist is lost or blurred, no "devices" like Larry's letter, no unobtrusive jumps. A much more effective use of irony reveals an increasing sophistication in the playwright. Symbolic effects, sparingly used, are completely effective: one single example, first pointed out by Welland, the taperecorder in Howard's office, from which you cannot erase the past, should suffice to indicate the validity of Miller's symbols in this play.

Miller's concern with the past is twofold: both as a social thinker and a dramatic artist. It is the theme of The Crucible and Incident at Vichy, and, in more individual terms, of After the Fall; and is an important element in A View from the Bridge. Even his latest play, The Price [not yet published - in this country, at any rate]. Superficially, it manifests itself in his frequent pattern of two successive generations in several of his plays: the last mentioned of these is described in a preview as being "about two brothers who are pinned in positions of flight from their own histories..." And Miller has provided an important clue to this concern of his with "how to dramatise what has gone before":

I say this not merely out of technical interest, but because dramatic characters, and the drama itself, can never hope to attain a maximum degree of consciousness unless they contain a viable unveiling of the contrast between past and present, and an awareness of the process by which the present has become what it is.

[My emphasis]

The present-past juxtaposition in dramatic structure, then, is not, for Miller, merely a device **for exposition**: it is his own awareness that the past becomes the present that prompts him to fuse the two in his stage-histories of men and man.

The great paradox, then, of Miller's technique in Salesman and some later plays is that he has sought a "density" essential to any serious representation in art of society and civilisation, but has found it in a complex "mind-centred" point-of-view. The protagonist in Salesman is not

made to step out of reality under the spell of some supernatural personage. There is nothing of the clinical isolation of what Miller condemns as the purely "psychological" drama - the case-history: even the abnormalities representing mental extremity in the drama of Tennessee Williams are not necessary here. Reality itself serves as a perfectly valid and adequate background to the revelation of the protagonist's individual "reality" and itself in the process.

The nature of reality in Miller's drama represents his highly individual brand of realism. As several biographical, and even literary "gossip" columns, would show, the playwright has first-hand acquaintance with a number of practical occupations. His European ancestry seems to have provided him, too, with numerous dramatic "facts" - the long story about the Polish Jews in Focus or the "story" of Incident at Vichy are two such examples. These are not just snatches of Jewish folklore, but bits of living history. He seems, too, to have a very sharp observation, and what is more, a strong selective memory. These, together with his avowed aim of "bringing the news" would logically suggest a more or less "naturalistic" dramatic form. And Miller's concern with facts, at an initial stage of the conception of a work, seems obvious from his accounts, for instance, of his research into the Salem documents in preparing for the composition of The Crucible. Much of the language of the play, when compared with some of the published "sources" in the transactions of the Massachusetts Historical Society, bears evidence of his ability to keep dramatic speech at an authentic level, whatever the "time" of the action.

But it must be said, to his credit as a thinker, that he is not bound to the normal canons of realism. He is extremely aware of the multiple meanings that attach to the word "real", and never assumes that the only reality is the positive concrete:

The longer I dwelt on the whole spectacle [of human dedication to evil] the more clear became the failure of the present age to find a universal moral sanction, and the power of realism's hold on our theater was an aspect of this vacuum. For it began to appear that our inability to break more than the surfaces of realism reflected our inability - playwrights and audiences - to agree upon the pantheon of forces and values which must lie behind the realistic surfaces of life. In this light, realism, as a style, could seem to be a defense against the assertion of meaning. How strange a conclusion this is when one realizes that the same style seventy years ago was the prime instrument of those who sought to illuminate meaning in the theater....

[C.P., p. 46]

Out of this understanding of the limited frame of the realistic theatre emerged the effort that resulted in the enlightening tale of a thinker-playwright's discovery of the usefulness of religious language. The interflow of language (somewhat in the manner of Milton - Satan speaking the same language as the unfallen) makes explicit the moral crisis of a society in such a way that the whole quality of life is organically present in the qualities of the persons. Less interesting on the surface than the preceding play, The Crucible has a sense of organic unity about it that saves it from being the "parable" it is alleged to be.

"The end of drama," says Miller, "is the creation of a higher consciousness and not merely a subjective attack upon the audience's nerves and feelings." [C.P., p. 21]. The distinction between "the passion to feel" and "the passion to know" is a clear one in Miller's dramatic ideology,

and so is his preference for the latter: "Drama," he maintains, "is akin to the other inventions of man in that it ought to help us to know more and not merely to spend our feelings." (The experience of writing The Crucible seems to have shown him that a theatre given more to objective knowledge is possible.) But this does not preclude the depiction of feeling in most of his work. Describing the genesis of *Salesman*, Miller recounts how he worked from definite structural images, of which the most dominant was:

an enormous face ... which would appear and then open up, and we would see the inside of a man's head. In fact, The Inside of His Head was the first title.

[C.P., p.23]

This would anticipate the use of a purely expressionistic method, but Miller felt that as a causal experiment, "it would be false to a more integrated - or less integrating - personality." [p.26]. Expressionism, too, would be the natural form to turn to for a playwright at such a stage of his development when he had, as Raymond Williams says Miller had, "touched" [Williams, op. cit.] the limits of naturalism, but what Miller developed eventually "an expressionist reconstruction of naturalist substance." [Ibid.]; says Miller:-

I had always been attracted and repelled by the brilliance of the German expressionism after World War I, and one aim in *Salesman* was to employ its quite marvelous shorthand for humane "felt" characterisation rather than for purposes of demonstration for which the Germans had used it.

[C.P., p. 39]

The "felt" characterisation as well as the character's feeling remains a vital instrument through which Miller's intellectual drama derives its

power. At times, however, the material of a play demands a more than usually rigorous control of the emotional element. This was the case with the first version of A View from the Bridge. Miller tried to keep the play at a distanced, abstract level because he feared that its content might be deeply disturbing to the audiences. He tried, he says, to hold back "the emphatic flood which a realistic portrayal of the same tale and same characters might unloose" [C.P., p. 50], but the result seems to have been an abstraction of reality that cannot be accepted as reality any better than the unpleasant, disturbing version of it could be. Miller had to revise the play and the English edition retains much of the vitality that one associates with the two plays that preceded it.

But Miller did try the expressionist, completely non-representational form in After the Fall, literally putting the idea of "The Inside of His Head" into practice. The first few minutes of the performance at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, were the most grotesque one can recall ever seeing on a stage, and for many playgoers the test of their patience was so long that - an unprecedented occurrence again - half the audience on the second night left the auditorium after the intermission. However. "The action," let us remind ourselves, "takes place in the mind, thought and memory of Quentin." The form of imitation is an endless monologue, interspersed with episodes from the protagonist's life. A "listener" is presumed at the end of the mind-stage who, says Miller, "to some will be a psychoanalyst, to others God, is Quentin himself turned at the edge of the abyss to look at his experiences, his nature, and his time..." [Satur-

day Evening Post, February 1, 1964]. The play's setting alone establishes its mood and method. It consists

of three levels [of the protagonist's consciousness] rising to the highest [=the deepest] at the back [least comprehensible to the conscious self]... Rising above all, and dominating the stage, is a blasted stone tower of a German concentration camp [a symbol of social evil]... On the two lower levels [the personal] are sculpted areas; indeed, the whole effect is neolithic, a lava-like geography...in which the scenes [enactments of memory] take place. The mind has no color [i.e., lacks awareness of its own colours] but its memories are brilliant against the grayness of its landscape... People appear and disappear instantaneously, as in the mind ... The effect, therefore, will be the surging, flitting instantaneousness of mind questing over its own surfaces and into its depths...

[Fall, p. 11]

Quentin, then, represents not only the central point of the action but also the "consciousness" of the play. It is he who probes his own psychological life. He shies away from certain thoughts, applies a selectivity of association to his own thoughts, but still there is nothing of the chaotic randomness of a "dream play" about his quest. A pattern of unity is imposed upon his self-search by the irony of his stray thoughts that bring in his first wife, Louise, or his mother, or Maggie, or Felice to offer essential comment and help the progression forward.- at times, by their mere appearance. There are "invisible" props as well as characters (for example, the boy Quentin) who represent, when "addressed", a moment of completely subjective point of view. On the other hand, certain "anonymous" men in Maggie's past remain anonymous because the protagonist cautiously refuses to put an interpretation upon them in ignorance of their nature beyond what Maggie herself has told him. Again, the "listener" is

in some measure an objective self, if still a part of the self of Quentin. The unity of the play arises, too, from a condensation of time by means of a completely new device Miller employs here - the condensation of language. For instance in the scene where Maggie and Quentin are listening to her recording in which she feels dissatisfied with the pianist, Quentin "steps out" of the scene:

Weinstein, get her Johnny Black!
 (The music turns over into another number and her voice,
 swift, sure.)
 There, now! Listen, now!

The rapid association of ideas, and the consequent "instantaneousness" of the appearance and disappearance of characters is, too, a device for foreshadowing and for suggesting complications and arousing suspense.

Despite the seeming unity, however, there is an inherent contradiction between the theme and the form. It is due largely to the handing over of all responsibility to a single character. The fact that he is no Lo-man, but an enlightened intellectual adds very little to the total objectivity of the form. The tension that arose, for instance in *Salesman*, between illusion and reality or between the three kinds of point-of-view mentioned previously is missing in *Fall*. Stream of consciousness may work in the novel because the reader has the time to go forward and backward in the text, but a spectator in the auditorium demands immediate clarity, and despite its harmony between free association of ideas and a coherent ethic, *After the Fall* fails to provide this. And Miller, after this most interesting experiment of his with a new theatrical technique, seems to have realised its practical limitations and turned to a much more direct and simple

style in Incident at Vichy.

Despite the solemn austerity of the theme, and a somewhat too obvious and even debatable ideology that it embodies, Vichy is a technically whole-some play. The setting recalls Gordon Craig rather than Strindberg. There is a unity of time and place, but a Shakespearean ascent in the action. Words, all spoken in the "present" rather than stage symbols set the mood of gravity. The uncertainty, the suspense as well as the major thematic question are stated by dialogue. The characters have reached a critical point in their lives and something vital is at stake. Tension is augmented by the repeated appearance of a guard, and the very disappearance of one of the victims every few minutes keeps audience response at a high pitch through the otherwise heavy dialectic. Action, as was pointed out earlier, aids the advance of the argument of the debate. There are varying levels of complexity of character, but the major personages undergo a considerable dramatic development. The very flatness of some of the characters helps in defining various shades of "reality" and in setting off those who are entrusted with the solemn task of distinguishing it from "facts". The gravity of their personal situation forces them into a recognition of their connection with what strikes them at first as an incomprehensible world. The intended movement is not very different from that in All My Sons but theatrical contrivance is replaced completely by dramatic irony which clinches the issue.

Miller is at a turning point in his career.

AFTERWORD

THERE is a tendency in all human beings to exaggerate differences: it is a particular gift of a critic. A great deal has been made of the divergence that marks the outlook and approach, attitudes and ideologies of the two playwrights discussed in this work. Williams is described as aesthetic, Miller, didactic; the former's vision is considered ~~private~~, the latter's ~~public~~; one is regarded as self-indulgent, the other, disciplined; one interested in the past, the other in the immediate present... To my mind, and I hope I have been able to indicate this in the foregoing study of their plays, there is one extraordinary meeting point between the "boy from Brooklyn" and the "shy, retiring Southerner": they are both troubled by the dilemma - how to maintain the INTEGRITY (by which I mean, and I think, they mean) the wholeness of human personality) of the individual under the impact of the prevailing social atmosphere. The major difference lies in their respective answers to the problem: Williams finds it in art itself - by which is meant a way of life and thought rather than the practice of an aesthetic profession; Miller finds it in ideas. In their best work both seek to offer their fellow contemporary man a source of sustenance and strength. Neither has yet found the final alchemy that will metamorphose the human condition, but both have come to a point of growth

where a considerably more coherent rationale of the human dilemma, expressed in a truly mature dramatic form may be expected of them. Williams' gradual renunciation of his earlier moral scepticism and a consequently enlarged and more balanced vision is anticipated by some of his more recent work; and Miller's long and restless experimentation with widely varying dramatic structures to embody his complex themes bears evidence of a similar promise in his future endeavours. No artist can be expected to produce masterpiece after masterpiece, but within their existing repertoire these American Blues already offer a deep spring of inspiration for the contemporary theatre. If Miller is the theatre's leader of ideas, Williams is (to borrow the expression Eliot used for Joyce) "the greater craftsman." Between them they have given rise to a whole style of dramaturgy executed upon the stage by such complementary artists as Elia Kazan, Harold Clurman, Cheryl Crawford, Margo Jones, Margaret Webster, Peter Wood, Peter Hall, Jo Mielzner...and emulated by modern theatres in more than two continents. But both Williams and Miller are still "young" — Ibsen, after all, was past the age of fifty when he produced anything of lasting value — and it would not be fair to judge them only on their present performance.

A brief word about the greater inadequacies and the questionable promise of this present study might not, it is hoped, be out of order. As every fresh rendering of Hamlet readjusts one's perspective on the Prince as well as his creator, so would one expect a whole series of responses to emerge or disappear at every renewed examination of Streetcar or

Salesman. The present effort is, therefore, offered as at best tentative
— no more than a beginning.

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- Five Plays. London: Secker & Warburg, 1962
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APPENDIX I

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: BIBLIOGRAPHY

Part I

Works by Tennessee Williams

I. FULL-LENGTH PLAYS (in chronological order):

1. Battle of Angels, with a note by Margaret Webster on the Boston production. New York: New Directions, 1945 [Revised and rewritten as Orpheus Descending, 1958, q.v.]
2. The Glass Menagerie. New York: Random House, 1945; with an introduction by the author, London: Lehmann, 1948; included in Four Plays, London: Secker & Warburg, 1956
3. You Touched Me! (with David Wyndham, suggested by a short story by D.H. Lawrence). New York: Samuel French, 1947
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5. Summer and Smoke. New York: New Directions, 1948; London: Secker and Warburg, 1952; included in Four Plays, London: Secker & Warburg, 1956
6. The Rose Tattoo. New York: New Directions, 1951; London: Secker & Warburg, 1955; included in Five Plays, London: Secker & Warburg, 1962
7. Camino Real. New York: New Directions, 1953; London: Secker & Warburg, 1958; included in Four Plays, London: Secker & Warburg, 1956
8. Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. New York: New Directions, 1955; London: Secker & Warburg, 1956; included in Five Plays, London: Secker & Warburg, 1962
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17. The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore. London: Secker & Warburg, 1965
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2. I Rise in Flames, Cried the Phoenix. (Limited edition): New York: New Directions, 1951.

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- 7. "Questions Without Answers", New York Times, October 2 [?3], 1948
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Part II

About Tennessee Williams

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12. William [J.] Weatherby, (i) "Making 'The Misfits'", (ii) "Conversation at St Clerans Between Arthur Miller and John Huston", in Guardian, November 3, 1960, p. 8
13. W.J. Weatherby, "The Misfits: Epic or Requiem", Saturday Review, XLIV (February 4, 1961), 26-27

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VIII. After the Fall

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2. Arthur Ganz, "Arthur Miller: After the Silence", Drama Survey, III (Fall, 1964), 520-30
3. Richard Gilman, "The Stage", Commonweal, LXXIX (February 14, 1964), 6, 13
4. William Goyen, "Arthur Miller's Quest for Truth", New York Herald Tribune, January 19, 1964
5. Jonathan P. Rice, "Arthur Miller: Fall or Rise", Drama, Summer, 1964, pp. 39-40
6. "The Miller's Tale", Time, January 31, 1964, p. 35

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IX. Incident at Vichy

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3. -----, "We are All Scum", Newsweek, December 14, 1964
4. Robert Brustein, "Muddy Track at Lincoln Center", New Republic, CL (December 26, 1964), 26-27; Henry Hewes,
5. Henry Hewes, "Broadway Postscript", Saturday Review, XLVII (December 19, 1964), 24
6. Jury [London], Issue 6 (February 14, 1966), pp. 203-215, reprinted reports on the London production, by ALAN BRIEN (Telegraph), RONALD BRYDEN (New Statesman), PENELOPE GILLIAT (Observer), HAROLD HOBSON (Sunday Times), PHILIP HOPE-WALLACE (Guardian), JEREMY KINGSTON (Punch), BERNARD LEVIN (Daily Mail), HILARY SPURLING (Spectator), JACK SUTHERLAND (Daily Worker), B.A. YOUNG (Financial Times), and ANONYMOUS Reviews from The Times.
7. Walter Kerr, "Kerr on Miller's New Play", New York Herald Tribune December 4, 1964.
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