TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AS A SOCIAL CRITIC

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The world of Tennessee Williams is populated with strangers, men and women who are alienated both from society and from themselves, and who are seeking the salvation of self-acceptance and re-entry into the brotherhood of man. Although Williams' primary interest is in the unique individuality which sets each of his characters apart from the world of his fellows, his works also say a great deal about the society from which his characters are estranged.

Yet critics disagree as to what extent he may be considered a social critic. John Gassner says that "There is no particular social passion in his work." 1 Nancy Tischler, one of the most thorough of Williams' critics and biographers, says that he is "no social critic" partially because of his vagueness about world affairs, but chiefly because:

"... he decided long ago, that his subject was man's inner life. His social criticism is usually limited to commentary on man's destructiveness; his political stand is limited to anti-fascism. Other than these, he is uninterested in specific world issues." 2

Other critics tend to find more elements of social criticism in his plays. Gerald Weales says that social criticism "runs under the surface" of most of Williams' work. Further, Weales distinguishes two different levels of social comment. At the first level, he feels that Williams' criticism is relatively commonplace:

It is a depiction of American success and its material attributes as empty and ludicrous. In other instances, Williams' comments become much harsher, dig under the surface to turn up the avariciousness and fear that presumably motivate those who want to find and hold their place in the "good life."

Signi Falk notes Williams' compassion for "frustrated and sensitive persons trapped in a highly competitive, commercial world . . . ." In What Is Theatre, Eric Bentley states the case more forcibly: "... he seems to want to kick the world in the pants ... ." Harold Clurman, in The Naked Image, says that "Tennessee Williams' work always had discernible social connotations . . . ." Norman J. Fedder believes that the works of Williams, as well as the works of D. H. Lawrence, are "preaching a rebellion of feeling against

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3 Gerald C. Weales, Tennessee Williams (Minneapolis, 1965), p. 10.
4 Ibid., p. 25.
the dehumanizing mechanisms of bourgeois civilization . . . .8

Ester Merle Jackson says that the works of Williams are "especially concerned with the illumination of the role of the American in the world of the twentieth century."9 Benjamin Nelson traces the social criticism in Williams' plays, noting that society gradually evolves into the universe, in the author's concept. Nelson also quotes from a letter in which Williams, writing to Audrey Wood, claims that his work has dealt with the "destructive impact of society on the sensitive, non-conformist individual."10

To the extent that Williams is not to be regarded as a crusader against a particular political party or religious sect or a specific war or type of social injustice, one may agree with Nancy Kischler. Nevertheless, it is true that a great deal of the dramatic tension in Williams' plays is derived from the conflict between society and the individual. In the majority of Williams' full length plays, a general pattern is discernible: at least one of the major characters finds that he is unable to remain in the position which society has assigned to him. The concept of social class has


either become meaningless or repugnant to him. His past experience and his inner integrity no longer permit him to support the status quo. At some point, usually prior to the events of the opening scene, the character has made an open break with the prevailing social order. For the characters in Williams' plays, this exterior break with society usually signifies an interior coming of age, coupled with a loss of innocence and illusion. As a result of his break with society, the character suffers a two-fold punishment—first, he is unable to establish meaningful communication with any member of the society, even when his survival depends upon his ability to do so. Secondly, society demands some form of retribution for the character's offence of withdrawal. In Williams' plays the usual method of establishing human contact is through sexual contact; the usual retribution of society is violence, either death or a condition comparable to death when related to a specific character. Insanity is an alternative to violent death. It is a defense mechanism, a method of escape, which usually occurs when the forces of integrity within the individual are opposed by a loneliness which is equally strong and unrelenting.

In a typical Williams play social retribution follows soon after the almost inevitable sexual confrontation. Sometimes, though rarely, a second, more permanent type of sexual communion is established after society has exacted its
retribution. Such is the case in *The Night of the Iguana* and seems to be the case in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. When sexual communion follows social retribution in the plays of Tennessee Williams, the plays may be considered optimistic, at least to a certain degree. When social retribution is the final action in one of Williams' plays, as in *A Streetcar Named Desire* or *Sweet Bird of Youth*, the play may be considered as definitely pessimistic.

In addition to allowing society such a prominent role as antagonist, Williams has made at least one notable explicit comment about the world in which his characters live. Despite his vagueness about specific world affairs, in the preface to an unpublished play, "Stairs to the Roof," the playwright offers the reader an insight not merely to his own reaction to world events, but to his concern for the society in which his chief character, Benjamin Murphy, attempts to find meaning:

When I was half way through (the play) the United States of America went to war. I wondered for a moment if I should go on. Or should I immediately undertake the composition of something light and frothy not only in spirit but matter? I decided not to. I am not so good at writing that I can afford to write something else. So I kept on--with this feeling about it. Wars come and wars go and this one will be no exception. But Benjamin Murphy and Benjamin Murphy's problem are universal and everlasting as far as I can see. Also,--this--If something is wrong at the top, why not look down at the bottom? Volcanic eruptions are not the result of disturbances in the upper part of the crater: something way, way down--basic and fundamental--is at the seat of the trouble.
At the bottom of our social architecture, which is now describing such perilous gyrations in mid-air, are the unimportant little Benjamin Murphys and their problems. Can it be that something is wrong among them?

Perhaps by a close examination of some of his works it will be possible to identify just what it is that Tennessee Williams believes is wrong among Benjamin Murphy and his friends. The purpose of this study is to examine the social criticism of Williams by careful analysis of six of his full length plays: The Glass Menagerie (1945), A Streetcar Named Desire (1947), Camino Real (1953), Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955), Suddenly Last Summer (1958), and The Night of the Iguana (1962). Taken together these six plays comprise the best known of Williams' works. Among them are the plays which form the foundation of his reputation as a major American playwright. Taken individually, each has a special claim for inclusion in such a study. [The Glass Menagerie offers a picture of society at the point of dissolution.]
One of its characters, Amanda, looks backwards to the past social order. Her son, Tom, remembers this as a time when the world was about to be shaken by total war. The focal character, Laura, is hopelessly trapped in the dissolving society of the present. [A Streetcar Named Desire develops the conflict between the past and the present social orders.]

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The destruction of Blanche signifies an end to the past of gracious virtues, a final destruction of the old order. Camino Real, a fantasy play, is Williams' most stinging direct comment on the existing social order, and his most explicit statement of one of possible solutions to the individual's current problems. Cat on a Hot Tin Roof exhibits a family and a society in which every relationship is in some way corrupted by mendacity, a society in which each man is cut off from those most closely related to him, each line of communication blocked. Suddenly Last Summer marks a transition in Williams' views in that the corrupt world has evolved into a devouring universe. The Night of the Iguana examines further the problem of man alienated from a god he considers to be a "senile delinquent." While the play focuses on man's frustrations in trying to communicate with his fellow men, it also explores the conflict between organized religion and the individual's need for an acceptable god.

After the analyses of the plays, the final chapter of this study will deal with the playwright's comments on specific aspects of the social order and will not be confined to the six major plays under consideration.
In The Glass Menagerie Tennessee Williams offers some of his most superficial and, at the same time, some of his most direct social criticism. By comparison to later full length plays, the first level of commentary in this play seems almost adolescent in tone, despite the fact that it was written and produced when the playwright was in his early thirties. So unwilling is Williams for the reader to miss his point that his directness becomes almost preaching. His earnestness is almost awkward. The opening directions seem like an indictment:

The Wingfield apartment . . . one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centers of lower middle-class population and are symptomatic of the impulse of this largest and fundamentally enslaved section of American society to avoid fluidity and differentiation and to exist and function as one interfused mass of automatism.

Tom, the narrator, whose memory of the final days of his youth is the substance of the play, begins by giving a brief social background:

. . . the thirties, when the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind.

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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 alphabet of a dissolving economy.

Two such statements at the very opening of the play make it all but impossible to escape the playwright's meanings—the American middle class is in trouble. Williams characterizes it as a dehumanized group which lacks both the vision to recognize its economic problems and the audacity to either encourage or condone individual differences. Shallow amusements and vicarious experiences offer a dream-like escape for this segment of society. Some of them subscribe to those matrons' magazines which feature "the serialized sublimations of ladies of letters . . . ."3 Others find protective illusion in the Paradise Dance Hall with its glass sphere which casts color on otherwise colorless lives as it revolves. Like Tom, many find escape in the movies: "People go to the movies instead of moving! Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them!"4 While the majority of the world watches the Spanish Civil War and the approach of the Second World War, the American middle class sinks deeper into escape through "hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, bars, and movies, and sex . . . ."5

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2 Ibid., p. 5.  
3 Ibid., p. 22.  
4 Ibid., p. 76.  
5 Ibid., p. 47.
Their jobs are as degrading as their meaningless amusements and herd-like living conditions. Like Tom, most of them are forced to surrender any dreams for the future in order to sustain the present. Most of them work under "flourescent tubes" and in buildings with a "celotex interior." A few still aspire to better things, of course, but their aspirations, like Jim O'Connor's, seem both crass and foredoomed. Only the illusion of a bright future gives Jim confidence. He is already disappointed in his rather slow start in the race for success. Yet Jim O'Connor's ambitions degrade him; not because they will never be realized but, rather, because they are superficial and undistinguished. For the middle class the ultimate goals are money, power, and knowledge, and Jim is sure that the secrets of social poise, public speaking and electro-dynamics will enable him to attain these completely satisfying goals.

Thus having instructed the audience, by repetition, that the American middle class of the twentieth century is ignorant, unimaginative and devoid of that spark of rebellion which enables better men to rise above their limitations, Williams ends his attacks. At this level they have been direct and heavy, but not nearly as effective as his more subtle and artistic attacks at a second level.

Each of the four characters in The Glass Menagerie represents a different attitude towards contemporary society.
That is not to say that the primary focus of the play is the characters' social viewpoint, but their responses to the world around them give an insight to the playwright's view.

Tom, the play's narrator, returns in memory to the last days of his family life in St. Louis where he lived in a shabby apartment with his mother, Amanda, and his sister Laura. There all three of the Wingfields, as well as the gentleman caller, Jim O'Connor, are clinging to individual illusions, attempting to insulate themselves from the reality of failure and loneliness.

Tom's illusion centers about a future in which he will enjoy great adventures, adventures which he can experience now only through the movies or through the novels of D. H. Lawrence. Jim O'Connor is preparing himself for business success by studying public speaking. The popularity and adulation he experienced as a high school hero will return, he thinks, with his inevitable business advancement. Amanda's illusion, which sometimes verges on desperation, is that something will change the family's situation. Laura's illusion is that the situation need not change at all.

Unlike her mother who can still face the threatening aspects of society, Laura Wingfield has given up and is retreating into her world of glass animals and old phonograph records. By contemporary standards her life has been a series
of defeating encounters with reality; that is to say, she is not productive. Excluding her secret romantic attachment to Jim, the class hero, her high-school memories center about the "awkward clumping" caused by her leg brace and her resultant shyness. Her high school final examinations frightened her so badly that she chose to quit school rather than to attempt them and risk failure. For six years she attempted nothing productive except a course in business college, which ended in dismal failure. Hoping to keep the truth of this failure from her mother, Laura has wandered about during the day, visiting the museum, the zoo, going to the movies and walking through the parks. These activities, like her glass collection, call for appreciation rather than production. But Williams makes it evident that society has no place for passive appreciators. Laura's dilemma--marriage or a career--becomes the focal problem for all the other characters in the play. As they react to Laura's lostness, they reflect their own concerns. Laura, herself, steadily retreats. The pressures of society are no longer something for her to contend with--her battles are all over and lost. The demands of her society that she become productive, that she fit into the traditional pattern of career or marriage become increasingly less important to Laura as she slips into her world of glass figures. Gradually the impossibility of passing the typing test at business college comes to be
equated, in her mind, with the impossibility of fitting into contemporary society.

Benjamin Nelson believes that Williams says "that she is beautiful, her beauty and fragility are anachronisms in our world, she will be destroyed, and this is a tragic thing." Certainly this is Tom's judgment of his sister which he expresses in the closing lines of the play: "... nowadays the world is lit by lightning! Blow out your candles, Laura." This final understanding of his sister is the result of maturity, separation and a variety of mellowing experiences. In his youth, Laura presents a point of emotional conflict to Tom. He loves her, yet he must reject Laura and her way of life if he is to save himself. Although she is dear to him, Tom recognizes that most people find Laura strange, that her pastimes, limited as they are to old records and the glass menagerie, are not normal to a girl of her age, and that her prospects of attracting "gentlemen callers" and, ultimately of marriage, are slight indeed. In his attempts to induce his mother to accept these facts about Laura, the source of a deeper inner conflict becomes apparent: Tom is supporting the family; Laura is his responsibility. As long as Tom continues to accept this responsibility, he will be trapped.

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in his job at Continental Shoemakers, where "for sixty-five dollars a month I give up all that I dream of doing and being ever!" A frustrated young poet, Tom feels that his life is becoming a "nailed-up coffin" from which escape becomes more difficult with every passing day. In a confrontation with his mother, Tom tells her that "Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter, and none of those instincts are given much play at the warehouse!" This is a statement of one of Williams' most persistent themes: that man must not surrender himself to the drudgery which mechanized society has come to accept as a way of life. Nancy Tischler points this out clearly:

Tom is a poet who is desperately unhappy in his warehouse job, and, as yet, frustrated in his poetry. Since Tennessee Williams knows something of this not-very-tender trap, he speaks with feeling about the afflictions of the machine age. Believing that many, like himself, are poetic rather than mechanistic, he considers surrender to the machine a perversion of man's nature.

Tom clearly believes that man's first obligation is to fulfill his individual destiny. The compulsion to become an actualizing individual cannot be checked for long by such a superficial restraint as Tom believes social mores to be, nor by his mother's constant reminders of his responsibilities.

Finally, even his loyalty to Laura proves too weak to hold

8Ibid., p. 27. 9Ibid., p. 40.

him. His trips to the movies and his drinking are only delaying actions. Tom knows that his place in the social structure, that of family breadwinner, will provide no room for adventure. When he is finally fired for "writing a poem on the lid of a shoe-box," he accepts the same solution his father had accepted years before: he runs away. Amanda has made his choice very clear to him: "Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job! Don't let anything interfere with your selfish pleasure!" Like his father, Tom finds that in order to discover and keep what makes life worthwhile, he must reject his family ties and his social responsibilities. From Tom's point of view, his action was the only way to save that part of his life which made him human. From Amanda's point of view things were quite different.

The character of Amanda Wingfield is unquestionably one of Tennessee Williams' greatest artistic creations. The complexity of her character is underscored by the fact that she is the only representative of her generation in the play. Her illusion is a future built on the memories and judged by the standards of the past, a past more gracious and more heroic than the seedy present state of the family. Clinging to such organizations as the D.A.R. for moral support, Amanda

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12 Ibid., p. 10.
stands resolutely in the present and attempts to fashion a future which will return her family to the social prominence she had enjoyed as a young girl in Blue Mountain. Although memories, possibly exaggerated ones, seem to dominate much of Amanda's conversation, a return to the past is not her illusion. Certainly she does dwell on that Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain when she had received "seventeen gentlemen callers," among them "some of the most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta," and undoubtedly, when she thinks of herself, it is as the young girl collecting jonquils and gentlemen callers until there was no more room in the house for either; yet, despite her close personal identification with a romanticized past, Amanda is keenly aware of the present. Nelson maintains that "Amanda does cling frantically to the past, but she clings just as desperately to the present. She is attempting to hold two worlds together and realizes that both are crumbling beneath her fingers." Amanda herself phrases it more dramatically: "... in the South we had so many servants. Gone, gone, gone. All vestige of gracious living! Gone completely!" The essentially tragic fact of Amanda's existence is that she is a member of a society which no longer exists. Like her marriage, it has dissolved without any formal declaration, but it has deserted her nonetheless.

13Ibid., p. 10. 14Nelson, p. 103.
15Williams, The Glass Menagerie, p. 80.
Feeling increasingly inadequate in contemporary society, Amanda has fashioned a protective illusion of the future—a bright and substantial future—for her children, especially for Laura, her crippled daughter. Amanda is quite aware that such an illusion must be formed into fact by the present, and when her son taunts her for making "plans and provisions" she retorts, "You are the only young man that I know of who ignores the fact that the future becomes the present, the present the past, and the past turns into everlasting regret if you don't plan for it!" For Amanda the present reality is an intolerable state of insecurity which can only be resolved by planning for the future. When she finds that Laura has stopped attending courses at the business school, she flings at her daughter those very questions which trouble her so much: "What are we going to do, what is going to become of us, what is the future?" At this point Amanda's hopes and fears for Laura become the focal problem for the play. As a deserted wife Amanda understands better than most the demands society makes on the unmarried woman. But Laura has failed dismally at the business college. She cannot even withstand the pressure of a typing test. "Her 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

16 Ibid., p. 55.
17 Ibid., p. 15.
almost had to be carried into the wash-room!" Recognizing that society offers only two possible alternatives to women— "Girls that aren't cut out for business careers usually wind up married to some nice man."— and that Laura has firmly closed the wash-room door on any hopes of a business career, Amanda characteristically plunges into a plot to bring about Laura's marriage. The plot, the marriage, Laura's whole future, is Amanda's great illusion. It is born of the desperate need to escape the insecurity of reality. Like most illusions, it is fearless; it feeds on fancy and tends to dismiss any inconvenient facts. To Laura's frightened protest that she is crippled, Amanda replies, "Why, you're not crippled, you just have a little defect--hardly noticeable, even! When people have some slight disadvantage like that, they cultivate other things to make up for it--."  

Amanda is determined to secure Laura's future, and when Tom invites Jim O'Connor to dinner, Amanda transforms him from a dinner guest to a "gentleman caller" for Laura. All the training of a gracious past has taught Amanda that it is illusion, not reality with which men fall in love. She sets out to beautify both the apartment and Laura. Shortly before Jim is due to arrive, Amanda makes a final effort to create the illusion of beauty for Laura by attempting to force on

\[\text{18} \text{Ibid., p. 16.} \quad \text{19} \text{Ibid., p. 21.} \quad \text{20} \text{Ibid.}\]
the girl a pair of "Gay-Deceivers." To Laura's objection that they make her feel like a trap, Amanda replies, "All pretty girls are a trap, a pretty trap, and men expect them to be." 21

Although Amanda tries to manipulate illusion for her own purposes, she is shrewdly practical about the family's present condition. A blown-up photograph of a smiling young man is a constant reminder of the concession Amanda made to illusion in her own life. She half-believes, half-hopes that the family situation can deteriorate no further, that as family they are not too different from the rest of society, and that there is still hope that Laura and society, will somehow reach accord. Though she wishes on the moon for the success of her children, and though she tries to force into reality her own dream that Jim will be "a very frequent caller!" and that "we're going to have a lot of gay times together! I see them coming!" 22 she understands more deeply than any other character in the play the reality of life.

Amanda recognizes that her constant nagging has made her hateful to her children; but she also recognizes that only through some type of self-improvement will either of them be able to survive in society. She is not enough of a "modern" to conceive that her children might consider running or total surrender as methods of self-improvement.

21 Ibid., p. 64.  
22 Ibid., p. 117.
Nor is she "modern" enough to accept Tom's speech concerning the instincts of man. She flatly rejects it: "Instinct is something that people have got away from! It belongs to animals! Christian adults don't want it!"23 What they do want, it appears, are "superior things! Things of the mind and the spirit! Only animals have to satisfy instincts! Surely your aims are somewhat higher than theirs!"24 Her attitude towards Tom's choice of reading matter, a novel by "that insane Mr. Lawrence," is at once practical and stern: "I cannot control the output of diseased minds ..."25

If she seems outmoded in some ways, she is more realistic than either of her children when she discusses her fears for Laura's future:

I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position. I've seen such pitiful cases in the South—barely tolerated spinster's living upon the grudging patronage of sister's husband or brother's wife!—stuck away in some little mouse-trap of a room—encouraged by one in-law to visit another—little birdlike women without any nest—eating the crust of humility all their life!26

Compared to her firm, if old-fashioned, grasp on reality, Jim O'Connor's glib pronouncements of "inferiority complex" and "confidence" and his panaceas of social poise and public speaking are superficial and tawdry. When Jim describes the "cycle of democracy," he is also describing the end of a type

23 Ibid., p. 40.  
24 Ibid.  
25 Ibid., p. 25.  
26 Ibid., p. 19.
of spiritual aristocracy. Such an aristocracy of quality is no longer capable of surviving in contemporary society where money and power determine the individual's success. Amanda is a left-over member of this aristocracy, and she recognizes her problem: "I wasn't prepared for what the future brought me." She understands too, that no matter what standard is applied to life, it will never be easy, and she warns Tom that it will require "Spartan endurance!" Of all the characters, Amanda alone recognizes the solution to the crisis of a rapidly changing social order: "In these trying times we live in, all that we have to cling to is--each other . . . ."

*The Glass Menagerie* is essentially the story of a family at the point of decline and dissolution; yet it is also the story of a society which has reached the same point. It is evident that Williams intends for the audience to be aware of the parallels which exist between the crisis in the Wingfield household and the world crisis which existed in "that quaint period, the thirties." Although social problems remain in the background throughout the play, it is clear that the struggle between reality and illusion in the Wingfield family reflects a similar struggle being enacted within the prevailing social structure. A Freudian concept of human behavior has replaced the Puritan ethic and fulfilling one's individual

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destiny has taken precedence over the acceptance of social responsibility for the common good.

In The Glass Menagerie time is the difference between reality and illusion, for the Wingfield family and for society as well. The Wingfields' illusion is the future, when that "long delayed but always expected something that we live for"\textsuperscript{29} will arrive. Society suffers from the illusion that things will be better, that the worst (the depression) is over. This sustained expectation, coupled with the fact that the play is a memory narrated by the now matured son, Tom, adds a constant factor of irony to the strain between reality and illusion.

The dramatic tension between Amanda and Tom is heightened in the play because Williams allows his own point of view to remain somewhat ambiguous. Jackson suggests that it is in The Glass Menagerie that his "primal universe collides with a second world called 'civilization.'"\textsuperscript{30} Williams undoubtedly approves of Tom's solution to life--live. Yet, his great sympathy and his admiration are for those lost members of the aristocracy of quality. Nelson states that "if there is to be any meaning in life it will have to come, Williams is

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{30}Ester Merle Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Madison & Milwaukee, 1965), p. 133.
saying, from the codes and traditions which his ragged cavaliers and tattered ladies are waving in the face of impending darkness."

The ultimate destruction of Laura is a warning of the increasing callousness in the social order which is dominated by the success philosophy of Jim O'Connor. It is a society in which both the Christian ethic and the traditional philosophies will undergo a watering-down process until all absolute standards are reduced to relative guidelines. Those who try to live by absolute standards will suffer the same ultimate fate as the glass unicorn which was robbed of its individuality when Jim, without malice, but unmindful of its fragility and intent on his own pursuits, broke off its horn.

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31 Nelson, p. 288.
CHAPTER III

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

When Blanche du Bois steps off her streetcar at Elysian Fields in search of her sister, Stella Kowalski, Tennessee Williams picks up the threads of themes already begun in The Glass Menagerie and begins to develop them further. John Mason Brown believes that Streetcar is "an extension, stronger and richer, of The Glass Menagerie . . . ."¹ Insofar as the element of social criticism is concerned, this is certainly true. The plight of the genteel Southern woman thrown into conflict with current society, the hopeless situation of the single woman who has neither male protection nor a career, the threat of extinction in a callous society—all these themes were begun in Menagerie and are given wider scope in Streetcar.

In Menagerie the symbols of a threatening society were outside the Wingfield apartment. The business college, the shoe factory, the newspaper warning of the onset of World War II, all of these could be blocked off, at least partially, by the simple expedient of closing the door. Much of the

strength of Streetcar is derived from the fact that the central symbols are the characters themselves. The triangle of Blanche, Stanley, and Stella extends beyond the characters' personalities and encompasses the whole of their society. The first scene shows Stanley throwing a bloody package of meat to his wife; and so reminiscent is this action of the return of the cave man from a successful hunt, that Stanley's place in the social scheme is immediately recognizable.

Blanche's position is as quickly defined as she steps off the bus "looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district."[The ensuing conflict between them and their struggle over Stella is as much a class struggle as it is a personal fight for survival.]

Stanley is a man whose development stopped as soon as he reached the level of being able to satisfy his animal instincts. He is perfectly content with his present situation; either he has no aspirations, or he has already fulfilled them all. His two-room apartment with the thin walls and informal neighbors provides him with his necessary sense of community. The male camaraderie of Mitch, Steve, and Pablo,—their bowling, poker games, bawdy stories and drinking—provide him with his full extent of recreation. But the central fact of Stanley's existence is his sexuality, his unchallenged position as the

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dominant male. Williams describes this as "animal joy" which springs from the center of his life: "... pleasures 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." 3 He is, above all, the "seed-bearer." This seems to be the only factor which ties the once refined Stella to him. He defines the whole basis for their improbable marriage when he tells Stella:

When we first met ... you thought I was common. How right you was, baby. I was common as dirt. You showed me the snapshot of the place with the columns. I pulled you down off them columns and how you loved it, having them colored lights going!

Stella, for her part, has accepted Stanley's animal-like behavior. In attempting to explain to Blanche why she returned to Stanley after a violent quarrel which culminated in Stanley's striking her, even though she was pregnant, she tells her sister: "But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark--that sort of make everything else seem--unimportant." 5 Thus, she completely confirms Stanley's assessment of their marriage; it is rooted in one fact only, their common joy in sexuality.

To Blanche, the marriage, the life her sister lives, the dingy apartment, and Stan's brutality--all are unacceptable. Even though she is desperate, she is unable to forsake her

3 Ibid., p. 23. 4 Ibid., p. 129. 5 Ibid., pp. 78-79.
past traditions. To accept her present situation would be to completely abandon the self-concept she is fighting so hard to re-establish and preserve. Her reaction to Stella's living conditions is one of refined shock: "Never, never, never in my worst dreams could I picture--Only Poe! Only Mr. Edgar Allan Poe!--could do it justice!"\(^6\) Alarmed by Blanche's reaction to the apartment, Stella tries to prepare her for the meeting with Stanley. She succeeds mostly in frightening Blanche still further when she reveals that she has not yet mentioned Blanche's visit to Stanley.

The relationship between Stanley and Blanche begins with indifference on his part, and a toleration borne of dependence on her part; but it rapidly develops into unalterable hostility. "Placed in opposition to Stanley Kowalski at the beginning of the play, she is the aristocrat who condescends to the plebian when she is not actually scorning him."\(^7\) For his part, Stanley is enraged by her affectations and senses in her a threat to his marriage. Further, he finds in her the only challenge to his place of dominance. Stella waits on her; her clothes are better than those he can provide for his wife; he suspects her of attempting to cheat him of his share of Stella's inheritance; she claims the affections of his close friend, Mitch; she

\(^6\) Ibid., p. 17.

refuses to obey him in his own home; she redecorates his apartment; and he senses that she is turning his wife against him. To Stanley, Blanche poses a threat to his preeminence. To Blanche, Stanley constitutes a threat to her survival. She has come to this place as a last hope and she is finding instead a final defeat. "Reality is encountered meaningfully when it becomes plain that Blanche comes to a haven to which she will be unable to decline and therefore 'adjust.' She must turn safety into hell, given the necessities of her character." And this is precisely what happens. The tension between Stanley and Blanche reaches its critical point for Blanche when she is witness to a violent quarrel between Stella and Stanley. At the height of the quarrel Stanley strikes his pregnant wife, and from that point forward Blanche is his enemy. For Stanley the same deadly animosity is aroused when he overhears Blanche urging Stella to leave him. It is here that the central message of the play is, here in Blanche's description of her brother-in-law:

He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something--sub-human--something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something--ape-like about him . . . . Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is--Stanley Kowalski--survivor of the stone age! . . . Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella--my sister--there has been some progress since then! Such things as art--as poetry and music--such kinds of new light have come into the world since then!

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make grow! And cling to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching. Don't--don't hang back with the brutes!

When Stan overhears Blanche's description of him, he attempts first to eject her from his home, and when that fails, reveals her as a harlot who has been fired from her teaching job because she seduced one of her students. She has become the local prostitute, seeking to find in a succession of sexual encounters some relief from overwhelming loneliness. Her young husband had years before killed himself when she scorned him for his homosexuality; the remaining members of her family died lingering, ugly and expensive deaths; the family home, Belle Reve, has been lost because of the "epic fornications" of grandfathers, uncles and brothers. Blanche is as bankrupt morally as she is financially. Life with her sister was her final hope; but Stanley destroys this possibility by revealing her past not only to Stella, but to Mitch—the last hope for marriage for Blanche—as well. In the final conflict between them, Stanley rapes Blanche while Stella is in the hospital bearing his child. She is defenseless, and when she reveals the attack to her sister, Stella regards it as an insane accusation and finally effects the ejection of Blanche from the home by having her removed to a mental hospital.

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Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire, pp. 80-81.
Blanche and Stanley obviously represent two quite different aspects of society. Blanche represents that Southern genteel agrarian tradition. It is a society of quality, one which shuns the brutes. But Williams also seems to hint that it is a society that has refined itself to the point of ultimate extinction. Like Blanche's husband, it lacks the virility to perpetrate itself. Not merely Belle Reve, but the whole society, like Blanche's family, is bankrupt and eaten away by the cancer of past excesses. Such a society is no longer fit to survive in the evolutionary process. Not only is it incapable of resisting the brute force of the industrialized society which Stanley represents; it is destined to be the prey of such brutality.

Charles Frankel in his book, The Case for Modern Man, observes that modern technology has "eaten out the social texture of modern society" and has tended to make all "social ties impermanent and thin." In contrast to this current situation, Frankel examines the family of the preindustrial society:

... the family is usually in only one of its aspects an arrangement for mating and bringing up children. It is an economic arrangement, and, even more, it is the basic form of social insurance. A marriage represents the union not of two people, but of two clans. It gives a man additional protection against his enemies, extends his influence in the community, cushions him against

sudden disasters like disease or bad crops, and guarantees that he will be cared for in his old age.  

It was to such a family that Blanche believed she belonged. Indeed, she shouldered her responsibilities by caring for the dying members of her clan. It was with this concept in mind that Blanche turned to her remaining family for shelter when she was in extreme need. But Stanley, and the world he represents, views the family only in its first aspect. So foreign is the broader concept of family to him that when he is told that Belle Reve has been lost he immediately suspects that he is being defrauded by Blanche. Angry because he feels Blanche is swindling him of what is rightfully his under the "Napoleonic code" he threatens to have her clothing and jewelry appraised; yet when he discovers that Blanche is telling the truth, he assumes no responsibility for her and offers her no help. In fact the only help he ever offers her is a bus ticket back to Laurel, the hometown which he knows she has been forced to leave. John Gassner states that Stanley must turn his home into a hell for Blanche because his brutish inclinations "have been inflamed by the sex-duel that has arisen between them--not without necessitous, if perhaps only half-conscious, initiative on her part."  

Yet, despite the fact that she has participated in such a relationship, to a person of Blanche's moral code and tradition, 

\[11\text{ibid., p. 201.}\]  
\[12\text{Gassner, p. 357.}\]
the rape by her brother-in-law must be compounded by the added horror of incest.

Even in their sex-duel, Stanley and Stella are true to their respective societies. Stella often fishes for compliments to negate her fear that she is old and unattractive to men, and therefore utterly without hope. Stanley, on the other hand, refuses the opportunities to compliment her. He believes himself to be as attractive to any woman as she might be to him, and he prefers a straightforward animal-like understanding to any type of gracious courting.

For Blanche, sex is not merely an end in itself, it is also a method. Her flirtation with Stanley springs from her dependency upon him for survival. When Mitch enters the picture as a possible candidate for marriage, she is even more coy with him, allowing him only to kiss her goodnight lest he lose proper respect for her. Until Stanley reveals her past to Mitch, Blanche has his respect. Once Mitch knows about her past, he no longer considers her clean enough to meet his mother, but he is still interested in her sexually, although he makes it clear to her that marriage is now out of the question. So desperate is Blanche for a release from loneliness that she even makes advances to the young boy collecting for the newspaper. If she cannot effect a solution to her problem through marriage, she can at least find a momentary release from pain. Her last attempt at survival is
a fantasy involving a proposed cruise with a former boy-friend, Shep Huntleigh.

It should be noted that this last fantasy is not strictly based on a sexual, but rather on a spiritual relationship. In describing this, Blanche underscores the basic personality difference between herself and Stanley. He sees himself as the "seed bearer" who both gives and takes pleasure in love. This is the extent of his idea of love. Blanche, on the other hand sees herself as a cultivated woman who is capable of offering a man companionship because she is both "a woman of intelligence and breeding," who has more to offer than the "transitory possession" of physical beauty. "Beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart"—these are the things which grow rather than diminish with age and Blanche finds it "strange that I should be called a destitute woman! When I have all of these treasures locked in my heart. I think of myself as a very, very rich woman!" 13 This presents one of the most tragic aspects of the play, for we are allowed to see Blanche not only for what she is, but also as what she believes herself to be.

Another aspect of the difference between Stanley and Blanche is their sense of moral responsibility. Because of a scornful comment about her young husband's homosexuality, Blanche has assumed the full guilt for his suicide. Stanley,

13Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire, pp. 145-146.
on the other hand, seems to feel no remorse over the rape. He does feel that Mitch should be told of Blanche's past because he could not allow an ex-army buddy to marry a harlot, but this seems to be the extent of his moral obligation insofar as Blanche is concerned.

The fact that Blanche's accusation of rape prompts Stella to reject her sister arouses no guilt in Stanley. As Blanche is led out of the apartment to the mental hospital, Stanley and his friends continue playing poker. Harsh reality is the atmosphere in which Stanley is most at home. The illusions of beauty and glamor are lost on him. For Blanche, anything is useful if it helps soften the harsh aspects of reality. She puts a colored lantern over the light fixture in the apartment, and she refuses to let Mitch see her either in the daytime or in a well-lighted room. But illusion has not always been protective for Blanche. In her marriage she had believed that her husband was "almost too fine to be human" and she "didn't just love him but worshipped the ground he walked on!"\textsuperscript{14} The illusion of such a perfect relationship had been cruelly stripped away when the husband was revealed to be a "degenerate." After the rape, everyone recognizes Blanche's illness, but most readers would agree with Gassner that she was already in need of psychiatric care when she

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.
first entered the Kowalski apartment. Blanche has long ago elected to take the "very human escape into self-deception, from little white lies to imaginative exaggerations to the delusion of the mad ... ."\(^{15}\)

The final member of the triangle, Stella, has chosen the life of the flesh rather than the noble, but decaying, life of the spirit. While the reader may fear for her and for what her life may become as a result of her decision to "hang back" with the apes, one also feels that she has escaped death by forsaking her traditions. She recognizes the gulf between Blanche and Stanley and she tries to help each to reach the other, or, failing that, to live agreeably together. But when the final choice must be made she chooses for Stanley.

One of the major problems with this play is that the sympathetic character is difficult to identify. Throughout the first five scenes of the play one feels that Stanley has just cause to resent Blanche's condescending manner and almost complete usurpation of his home. But from the time that Stanley reveals Blanche's past to Mitch, one begins to see a true brutality emerging in his character. As Stanley becomes less and less human, Blanche becomes more and more so.

\(^{15}\)Gassner, p. 357.

The characteristics which are so irritating in Blanche at first are now pathetic, for we recognize them as defenses. At the same time, Stanley's attractive virility begins to degenerate into brutishness. Because of this ambivalence, it is difficult to determine Williams' point of view. This is particularly true because Williams seems unusually fascinated with the character of Stanley. His virile dominance is never totally condemned. At one point Williams seems to suggest that a mixture of Stanley's and Blanche's characteristics might be desirable. Though Williams is fascinated with Stanley, he also has a deep admiration for Blanche, and this further muddles his point of view. He is reported to have stated the theme of the play thus: "If we don't watch out, the apes will take over."\(^{17}\) Such a statement, coupled with Stanley's evident brutality in the rape scene, indicates that Williams' sympathies are completely—though, perhaps reluctantly—with Blanche.

Critics are agreed on the social significance of A Streetcar Named Desire. Benjamin Nelson states that "In particular, Chekhov's central theme of one civilization giving way helplessly but inevitably before another was seen by Williams as paralleling the antebellum and contemporary

South." This, Nelson feels, is the prominent theme in 
Streetcar. Bamber Gascoigne, speaking of Stanley and Stella, 
states: "Their antipathy has undertones of flirtation, 
initiated by her but leading eventually to rape; at the same 
time it has overtones of the struggle between social groups, 
the old and the new, the decadent and the virile, butterflies 
and apes." Norman Fedder believes that Williams is "preaching 
a rebellion of feeling against the dehumanizing mechanisms of 
bourgeois civilization." John Gassner concurs with these 
views but goes on to point out that Williams seems to have 
"muddled the social basis for Blanche's drama." Gassner 
further objects that Williams "seems to have succumbed to a 
generally jaundiced view of normality by giving the impression 
that the common world is brutish, as if life in a poor neigh-
borhood and Stan and Stella's sexually gratifying marriage 
were brutish." Though this is a view that Williams 
contradicts, the existence of such hints and contradictions 
adds to the troublesome ambivalence which weakens the focus 
of the play.

18Benjamin Nelson, *Tennessee Williams: The Man and His 
19Bamber Gascoigne, "*Tennessee Williams," Twentieth-
20Norman J. Fedder, *The Influence of D. H. Lawrence on 
21Gassner, p. 357. 22Ibid., p. 358.
In *A Streetcar Named Desire* Williams has reemphasized the majority of the social themes found in *The Glass Menagerie*: two cultures in conflict, the nobility of the lost traditions, the desperate struggle for survival in a callous world, the dependence of the non-productive woman, the lack of any distinction in the middle class, the need of sensitive individuals to withdraw into illusion in order to filter out the harsh light of reality, the dehumanizing effect of industrialization, the applicability of Freudian psychology, the ultimate advice to humanity to live life coupled with an admiration for those who find it unbearable because of its lack of quality.

Williams has also introduced new social themes in *Streetcar*: sexuality as a temporary weapon against loneliness and as a reaction against death, divergent forms of sexuality—in particular promiscuity and homosexuality—and the linking of the latter form to a relationship too pure to exist in the real world, the eventual brutality which results from the weakening of social bonds by industrialization. Williams also hints at a relationship between the poverty of surroundings and the brutality of the individual, but this point is too unclear to establish as fact.

There is no doubt that Williams' sympathies lie with the Amandas and Blanches of this world; he admires their quality, but he sees their cause as a hopeless one, engulfed and overpowered by the insensitivity of the modern world.
CHAPTER IV

Caminó Real

Camino Real is the only full length play by Tennessee Williams which is primarily devoted to social criticism. Here Williams examines most of the shortcomings of American society and hints that American society needs to change before her vitality deserts her for another home.

The play is a rather loose and extremely expressionistic dream fantasy in which characters from literature mingle with those from Williams' imagination, all of them bearing strong resemblance to morality play characters. Throughout the introduction and sixteen scenes, or blocks, the emphasis shifts from one character to another, although the central character is Kilroy, the symbol of American innocence abroad.

Excluding Gutman, symbol of the establishment, all the major characters are united by a common desire to escape from Camino Real, a place where man's dignity is sustained only by money and illusion. Williams' stage directions call for a scene divided in half with the luxury hotel, Siete Mares, on one side and the Skid Row of pawn shops, flea-bag hotel, and gypsy's stall on the other. The directions also call for a silk wall hanging of a phoenix, "since resurrections are
so much a part of its [the play's] meaning." The action of the play takes place in the plaza of Camino Real. A great flight of steps ending in an archway, which leads to the "Terra Icognita," a wasteland, indicates the sole avenue of escape. Other arches lead off the plaza, but, like illusions, these are dead end streets. To survive, the characters must have enough money to support life on the luxury side of the plaza or to escape, they must have enough courage to traverse the unknown.

As Don Quixote and Sancho approach this tropical seaport, Quixote is lecturing Sancho on the need to remember the virtues of youth—"Nobility," "Truth," "Valor," and "Devoir." Quixote laments that now these words are nothing more than "meaningless mumble of some old monk hunched over cold mutton . . . ." As they reach the frontier of Camino Real they encounter Gutman who is dressed in white pith helmet and linen suit, much like the picture of the American overseer in the backward country. Sancho refuses to enter the plaza. He has located the place on a map, and he reads from it, warning Quixote that this is "the end of the Camino Real and the beginning of the Camino Real"--the end of the royal road and the beginning of the real road. The map advises:

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2Ibid., p. 4.
3Ibid., p. 5.
"turn back, Traveler, for the spring of humanity has gone dry in this place . . . ." 4 Although Sancho deserts him, Quixote goes forward to sleep and dream against the wall of the town: "And my dream will be a pageant, a masque in which old meanings will be remembered and possibly new ones discovered . . . ." 5 Throughout the rest of the play Williams enumerates the ills of current society.

The first of these diseases eating away at modern society is loneliness. Before going to sleep Quixote has remarked on the number of figures on the plaza who seem to be isolated from one another. When Sancho leaves him he elects to share this loneliness: "When so many are lonely as seem to be lonely, it would be inexcusably selfish to be lonely alone." 6 Shortly after, Jacques Casanova comforts Prudence who is crying over her dead dog. He observes that "It is a terrible thing for an old woman to outlive her dogs." 7 Thus he implies that the old are neglected by all but their pets, that there is little companionship left for them. Rosita wanders up and down like a street vendor calling "Love? Love?" and offering one of the temporary respites against loneliness. When Kilroy arrives on the plaza he tells the Gypsy that he is hungry, lonely and lost. He is constantly on the look-out for a

4Ibid.  
6Ibid., p. 6.  
5Ibid., p. 7.  
7Ibid., p. 9.
fellow American with whom he can communicate. He regrets the lack of such community organizations as the YMCA—"a Protestant church with a swimmin' pool . . . It does good in the community."8 After his pocket has been picked and Gutman charges him with vagrancy, Kilroy finds that despite the number of witnesses to the crime, not one will come forward to support his story. Marguerite Gautier is terrified of aging because she, "who used to be paid for pleasure,"9 now has to pay. She is equally frightened of the hospital from which she has fled. It is a place where the sick and dying are separated from the healthy, yet they are able to hear them call to one another through the snowy woods. The patients must live on the letters from friends, but these communications dwindle from ten-page letters to postcards as the sick are forgotten. They are finally isolated in a little white gauze tent to await death. When Marguerite confesses these fears to Jacques, he confirms her suspicion that he, too, is afraid of "any place on earth without you with me!"10 The loneliness on the Camino Real is not just an individual problem, it extends, as do all the other problems, into the society as a whole. Jacques explains to Kilroy that any serious communication between people from the opposite sides of the plaza is "regarded

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8 Ibid., pp. 38-39.  
9 Ibid., p. 66.  
10 Ibid., p. 71.
unfavorably here. You'll notice I'm talking as if I had acute laryngitis. I'm gazing into the sunset. If I should start to whistle "La Golondrina" it means we're being overheard by the Guards. The guests of the luxury hotel spend their time in talking of restaurants, hairdressers and other frivolities. Serious questions about the meaning of life or of their ultimate goals are either completely avoided or "passed amongst them like something illicit and shameful, like counterfeit money or drugs or indecent postcards--."  

Another of the evils affecting both the individual and society is the passage of time, specifically the time between the wild and courageous illusions of youth and the awakening to disillusionment. "Sometimes we sleep too long in the afternoon and when we wake we find things changed . . . ."  

For the most part the characters in Camino Real are jaded. They have resigned themselves to existence rather than life, yet the vision of their lost youth and innocence is important to them as the basis of their current illusions about themselves. Kilroy's refusal of Rosita's solicitation is an example of this illusion: "I have ideals," he tells her, yet in the end, he will hock all his "sweet used-to-be" for a similar chance at "love" with Esmeralda. Most of the

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11 Ibid., p. 42.  
12 Ibid., p. 15.  
13 Ibid., p. 9.  
14 Ibid., p. 28.
illusions are shattered for the characters before the end of the play. Kilroy finds that Esmeralda prefers to dream of him as the "Chosen Hero" rather than be with him in reality. Jacques Casanova is crowned king of the cuckolds, and finally is reduced to accepting the charity of Marguerite. The shattering of their illusions is made even more poignant by the effort which they have put forth to maintain them. Casanova has undergone a paralysis of the will which has prevented him from opening the letter which brings his financial ruin. Esmeralda helps Kilroy in the face of her mother's disapproval, she dreams of him and prays for him, but he is lost to her forever because she cannot recognize him when he returns to her. Kilroy vows never to sell his golden-gloves because they represent his self-concept; yet when Esmeralda seduces him by recalling his past to him, he not only sells his gloves, but, finally, his golden heart as well. So, his heart which he would not risk by staying with his wife is sold, after it is cut out of him, for the love of a woman who merely reminds him of his wife. Marguerite, who resists Jacques' tenderness because it indicates her aging state, finds that without him she is completely alone; her paid lovers want nothing more from her than money. Marguerite also forces Jacques to face the fact that he is afraid to attempt an escape from Camino Real. The known terrors are less frightening to him than the unknown, and he is more willing to face humiliation at the hands of Gutman.
than he is to face loneliness. The few residents of Camino Real who do seem to escape when the Fugitivo, an unscheduled airliner, takes them aboard, are doomed instead, when the plane crashes.

Illusion is not merely a private problem; like loneliness, it extends into society as well. Whenever the state finds that the people are restless, a diversion is produced for them. A festival is announced by the Gypsy, at the insistence of Gutman, which provides the ultimate illusion of the return to innocence. The Gypsy's daughter, Esmeralda, will be restored to the state of virginity by the full moon. Like the Roman government which provided bread and circuses, Gutman's quasi-military government has learned to weaken the people by helping them maintain their habitual sloth. As a private individual, Gutman uses the same technique with Jacques. When Jacques' credit at the Siete Mares has been discontinued, Gutman placates him with a small ration of brandy. Thus, both private and governmental control is maintained as much by the people's own vice as it is by force. Jacques' plight is shared by all the community: "Here I sit, submitting to insult for a thimble of brandy... while directly in front of me—a man in the plaza dies like a pariah dog!—I take the brandy! I sip it!—My heart is too tired to break... ."

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15 Ibid., p. 19.
One character who dares to break out of the pattern of easy living is Byron. Realizing that the luxury of success has ruined him, he prepares to make a departure from "my present self to myself as I used to be!" Kilroy himself remembers a time when the street was "royal" but the past is only valuable to Byron because he alone uses it as a motivating force to change his present situation. For all others "Used to be is the past tense, meaning useless." Baron De Charlus tells this to Kilroy in an effort to warn him away from the illusion of the past because "the name of the Camino is not unreal!"

Another aspect of the diseased society with which Williams deals in the play is the inherent American scorn for what is foreign. Kilroy arrives in Camino Real complaining about the foreign ship which has brought him. He ridicules the local currency to the first official he meets, and it is not long before he is threatening the local populace with the American Embassy because of the theft of his money. "Whichever of you rotten spivs lifted my wallet is going to jail." He mistakenly identifies the Baron and Casanova as fellow Americans because they are well dressed indicating the American presumption that all which is clean or prosperous

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16 Ibid., p. 19.  
17 Ibid., p. 37.  
18 Ibid.  
19 Ibid., p. 30.
must necessarily be American. For his part, Kilroy is made to appear so naive that the Baron finds him too innocent to solicit. He is too artless to protect his money, and finally his innocence reduces him to the state of Patsy. In the costume of his role he is unable to communicate except by lighting his electric nose. He is the classic sucker, dehumanized for the amusement of the populace. In his patsy role he becomes the symbol of conformity. Outside this role he is led by his innocence to ask dangerous and unsettling questions, and, along with Jacques, to recognize the importance of romance in life. When he temporarily escapes from his Patsy role he is forced to beg for the job back because he is terrified of death.

Society also suffers from momentual callousness, which makes death on the Camino Real more than normally terrifying. Bodies are collected by the Street Cleaners who wheel them off stage in a large trash barrel. At the beginning of the play they are dressed like public servants, but as their white coats become more stained with each death, they become more and more frightening. Gutman explains that of all the people in Camino Real they alone "can't be discharged, disciplined nor bribed! All you can do is pretend to ignore them." Gutman confesses that the thought that death can come to him curdles his blood "like milk on the doorstep of someone gone

\(^{20}\textit{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 58.}\)
Death is robbed of any dignity by the snickering of the Street Cleaners who, quite obviously, relish their job. Furthermore, the final disposition of the body depends upon the wealth of the individual. Lady Mulligan, because she is rich, has some hope that they will comply with her request to have her husband's body packed in ice and shipped to his office. The bodies of the poor, on the other hand, are used for medical research, and any unusual organs are preserved for public display. Death has become the ultimate indignity with which a collectivistic bureaucracy violates the poor.

This protection of the privileges of the rich is one of the greatest evils in Camino Real. The luxury hotel, Siete Mares, is the bastion of the rich against the plaza and Skid Row on the other side. When the Survivor, a Christ figure, finds the well in the plaza dry, he staggers toward the only other source of water, the hotel. His dirty and desperate condition would be too unsettling to the guests of Siete Mares, so, at Gutman's order, a guard warns the Survivor to turn back. When he ignores the guard, he is shot. Jacques inquires about the disturbance and Gutman attempts to put him off with the explanation that happenings on the plaza do not need to concern the hotel's guests. But when Jacques

\[21\] Ibid.
insists that he heard shots, Gutman replies with the official government position:

Shots were fired to remind you of your good fortune in staying here. The public fountains have gone dry, you know, but the Siete Mares was erected over the only perpetual never-dried-up spring in Tierra Caliente, and of course that advantage has to be protected—sometimes by—martial law . . .

Shortly afterwards Gutman threatens Jacques that he will be forced to leave the hotel and take up residence in the flop-house, "Ritz Men Only," on the opposite side of the square unless his remittance check does not arrive. When the long awaited letter does arrive Jacques is too frightened to open it until Gutman forces him to do so by preparing to throw his possessions out of a window. When the letter reveals Casanova's financial ruin, Gutman immediately pitches his trunk from the window. Jacques' plea that it contains fragile memories is useless. When Lady Mulligan complains to Gutman about the presence of Marguerite and Casanova in the hotel, Gutman replies that they have paid the price of admission: "Desperation!—With cash here! (He indicates the Siete Mares.) Without cash there! (He indicates Skid Row.)"

Marguerite is still rich enough to buy the distractions which help her blunt the sharpness of reality—dope and sex. But she is cheated of an escape on the Fugitivo despite her riches, because her papers have been stolen. While Gutman represents

22 Ibid., p. 17. 23 Ibid., p. 72.
the establishment's efforts to maintain the status quo, the privileges of wealth, all the greed is not confined to the rich.

Many of the poor who live in the Skid Row section are willing to do anything to gain the privileged position of the rich. Rather than attempting to reform or even challenge the system, they are willing to sell themselves, their sisters and daughters. They pick Kilroy's pocket during his first few minutes in town, the paid lover of Marguerite robs her, and the Baron's pickup murders him. The Gypsy sells her daughter's restored virginity at every festival, and, when Kilroy becomes the Chosen Hero, she even cheats him out of his change. Kilroy explains to Esmeralda even as he makes love to her, that a realistic view of gypsies' daughters tells him that all of their hearts are made of stone which only responds to "sounds like the snap of a gold cigarette case!"\(^{24}\)

Not only is society diseased, it also lacks some fundamental human elements. Love is the biggest single problem on the Camino Real. It is almost non-existent. Counterfeits are readily available. Marguerite can afford a young lover and the Baron is able to find partners to help him fulfill his masochistic-homosexual desires. Esmeralda has both her mother and her brother acting as her pimps, and Rosita wanders the streets offering it. Kilroy defines love as a "four

\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 128.
letter word." Kilroy's heart trouble—produced by a heart the size of a baby's head—has made him afraid of love as well as everything else which gives him joy in life. His love for his wife has prompted him to leave her, since, in his condition, he could not give her the physical expression of his love, and he did not wish to tie her to a life of frustration. Noble as his motives might have been, he finds that on the Camino Real his only protection against the confusion, humiliation and fear of death is a sexual experience with Esmeralda. Even in the cold, business-like atmosphere of the brothel, Kilroy finds the experience useless unless, in addition to the sexuality, each partner assures the other of his sincerity. Gutman introduces Marguerite as the faded legend of "the sentimental whore, the courtesan who made the mistake of love" and observes that "legends fade when they burn into day!" 25 When Jacques begins to care for Marguerite and attempts to shelter her, she becomes angered because his attention implies that her charms are fading. While she is fighting to escape on the Fugitivo, she uses Jacques, insisting that he help her, but not giving a thought to his possible escape. When the plane takes off without her she turns on him viciously but then, in need of comfort, returns to him. She expresses wonder when he accepts her. Jacques attempts to explain that this is the first time that he has experienced

25 Ibid., p. 59.
the tenderness of love. She again humiliates him by paying for a younger lover. She is convinced that distrust and not love, is the only protection against the pain of betrayal. Casanova's love, she feels, is merely a mixture of habit and disillusionment. When her young lover robs her and humiliates her, she finds that she must be willing to support Jacques, not because he demands it, but because she needs him and he can no longer support himself.

The paucity of individual ability to love has corrupted the whole of society. The Survivor attempted to cross the desert on foot in order to escape Camino Real. When he returned, he was shot, and, while many watched, there was no compassion until The Dreamer appeared leading La Madrecita. At the sight of the blind woman and the guitar playing Dreamer, Gutman is fearful that a revolution might erupt. He is so unnerved that he calls the Generalissimo—"Hello, sweetheart"—to warn him that a woman capable of claiming the people's love, which "belongs safely only to you," has just entered Camino Real. He warns the Generalissimo that "good dreamers who remember their dreams"\textsuperscript{26} are dangerous elements in society. As the conversation is going on, La Madrecita, Mother of the Lost, recovers her sight. The Dreamer embraces the Survivor and pronounces the "forbidden word." At the sound of the word, "Hermano," the crowd becomes excited, and

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 20.
the guards are forced to put velvet ropes up to protect the hotel, and then to control the crowd with clubs. The fiesta is announced as a measure to divert the people, and it does so, completely; but Casanova is shocked. He and Gutman argue over the word:

Gutman: Yes, the most dangerous word in any human tongue is the word for brother. It's inflammatory.—I don't suppose it can be struck out of the language altogether but it must be reserved for strictly private usage in back of soundproof walls. Otherwise it disturbs the population . . . .

Jacques: The people need the word. They're thirsty for it!

Gutman: What are these creatures? Mendicants. Prostitutes. Thieves and petty vendors in a bazaar where the human heart is a part of the bargain.

Jacques: Because they need the word and the word is forbidden!

Gutman: The word is said in pulpits and at tables of council where its volatile essence can be contained. But on the lips of these creatures, what is it? A wanton incitement to riot, without understanding. For what is a brother to them but someone to get ahead of, to cheat, to lie to, to undersell in the market. Brother, you say to a man whose wife you sleep with!—But now, you see, the word has disturbed the people and made it necessary to invoke martial law!  

The stage directions for Block Ten call for the suggestion of war, a city after bombardment; thus the playwright suggests one possible result of the lack of love in society. Nor is

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27 Ibid., pp. 21-22.
the problem limited to a global lack of understanding. Kilroy tells the Gypsy that humanity is a work still in progress and that, "We're all of us guinea pigs in the laboratory of God." Later he indicates to Esmeralda that not only does man fail to grasp God's pattern, but man's religion, his "Mumbo Jumbo," has put God to sleep. After his seduction of Esmeralda, Kilroy is led to pity not merely for himself, but for all the world and the God who made it, so hopeless does life seem to him. When he rushes from the Gypsy's, he has at least stirred Esmeralda enough to cause her to shed a tear; but as he pleads to Gutman to "Have a heart!" he is unable to raise even a reply. Universal self-pity and despair characterize the world without love or compassion.

Another missing element in this society is the wild and free spirit which is symbolized for Quixote by a scrap of blue ribbon which should be tucked into whatever remains of a knight's armor, or "borne on the tip of his lance, his-- unconquerable lance!" For Don Quixote, this wild and free virtue is nobility. To Gutman it is a fury which is a "luxury of the young," and he feels that once men succumb to the easy life they are rendered incapable of any resistance. Casanova is not surprised to find Kilroy assigned the role of Patsy because Kilroy possesses the fury of innocence. Jacques tells him that "Nothing wild or honest is tolerated here! It has to

28 Ibid., p. 113.  
29 Ibid., p. 3.
be extinguished or used to light up your nose for Mr. Gutman's amusement . . . ." Such virtue is the very thing required of those who wish to escape from Camino Real. They must be courageous enough to walk up the flight of stairs and into the unknown. Although Kilroy is constantly planning escape, he lacks the courage to undertake the trip. Jacques tries to instill just a bit of courage into Marguerite when he tells her that she must "learn how to carry the banner of Bohemia into the enemy camp," but Marguerite rejects this idea, "Bohemia has no banner. It survives by discretion." Later Marguerite challenges Jacques' desire to "leave with honor," by forcing him to face his own lack of courage. Byron alone possesses enough of the quality to leave, even though he is unsure of his destination. "Freedom" still means something to him, and, goaded by the memory of the purity of Shelley's burning heart, he is resolved to find the art he has lost in luxury. When Jacques demonstrates what can happen to the human heart by stepping on a loaf of bread and pulling it apart, Byron grants him his point; nevertheless, Byron persists in his determination. "A poet's vocation . . . is to influence the heart in a gentler fashion . . . . He ought to purify it and lift it above its ordinary level," he tells Jacques. Despite Casanova's misgivings and Gutman's harrassment, Byron

30 Ibid., p. 57.  
31 Ibid., p. 63. 
32 Ibid., p. 77.
is sure that his lost purity and his fading art are linked together, and that to restore the latter, he must also restore the former. "There's a time for departure even when there's no certain place to go!"33 His positive response to the nihilistic atmosphere is: "Make voyages!—Attempt them!—there's nothing else . . . ."34 Excluding Kilroy's nearly hysterical outburst at the approaching Street Cleaners, no spark of real resistance is evident in the play until Kilroy's resurrection.

Later when Kilroy's body, still in the lap of La Madrecita, is being used as a demonstration piece in a medical lecture, La Madrecita's lamentations for his wild spirit are counterpointed by the Instructor's observations. "This was thy son, America," La Madrecita sorrows, "and now mine."35 When the Instructor removes Kilroy's solid-gold heart which is the size of the head of a baby, he is restored to life, and the first indications of real hope appear in the play. Kilroy's daring also has been restored: "This is my heart! It don't belong to no State, not even the U.S.A."36

Once hope is introduced on the Camino Real it seems to spring up everywhere. In quick succession Kilroy prays with sincerity and, seemingly, some hope of an answer—"Mary, help a Christian!!"37 Esmeralda also prays—"God bless all con

33Ibid., p. 78. 34Ibid. 35Ibid., p. 148. 36Ibid., p. 152. 37Ibid.
men and hustlers and pitch-men who hawk their hearts on the street . . . .

Don Quixote awakens and approaches the dried fountain in the plaza, causing it to flow. His advice to Kilroy that rather than pity himself, Kilroy ought to accept the wounds to his ego with a "tolerant smile" excites the admiration of Gutman. When Casanova and Marguerite find the ability not only to love but to accept one another, Kilroy and Quixote set out for the mountains of Terra Incognita where the "violets" have "broken the rocks."

Had Tennessee Williams written Camino Real in a realistic manner, that is, had he written a play in a realistic manner which dealt with all the themes of social evil which are contained in Camino Real, it would have been unbearable. Williams has constructed a world in which whatever is necessary to sustain man spiritually is withheld from him. If the structure of a dream fantasy seems to make the play more confusing to the reader, it does not make it less true. The Gypsy's questions seem to pinpoint many of our current evils: "Do you distrust the newspapers? Are you suspicious of governments?" This is very near the description of contemporary society which Charles Frankel gives:

In the last forty years there has not been a major European capital from London to Moscow which has not seen revolution or war in its streets. In an orderly society men carry around with them the unconscious expectation that things will go so far and no farther.

38 Ibid., p. 155.  
39 Ibid., p. 28.
that habit, tradition, good manners, or the simple inertia of the status quo will be able to draw the line. The experience of the last forty years, in which the unimaginable seems to have become real, has deeply shaken this sense where it has not completely destroyed it.

James L. Roberts in his discussion, "The Role of Society in the Theater of the Absurd," observes that part of man's ultimately absurd condition is the "result of his being compelled to exist without his individualism and in a society which does not possess any degree of effective communication." Surely Kilroy-the-Patsy, reduced to communicating with his blinking nose, is a perfect example of this. Walter Kerr and Benjamin Nelson find that Williams' ultimate solution to the problem of a corrupting society is dissociation. Reinhold Niebuhr notes a similar tendency when contrasting the individual moral standards and the morality of society. But in Williams' view social morality is precisely the magnification of individual morality. Sigi Falk views the Camino Real as a world in which all "religious and moral codes have


become mechanical rituals." This is the "mumbo jumbo" which has put God to sleep. From such confusion, only the poet and his tradition can help mankind find an escape. Jackson believes that Williams sees the human condition as the result of an "extended moral crisis," and she finds many similarities between Williams' ethic and the philosophies of Karl Jaspers and Sartre. The final solution which Williams offers is one of rigorous stripping away of illusions about oneself and the active exercise of sympathy for others.

Tennessee Williams' own thoughts about the play reveal that he was so deeply immersed in the meanings of Camino Real that he did not foresee the problems which audiences have had in grasping such a fully expressionistic work: "I haven't worked these things all out consciously and I never realized that they might be confusing until I started reading the play to prospective backers . . . ." "I had to read it aloud twice to backers who stalked out without comment."

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47 Ibid., p. 144.
Gelb states that Williams is "exorbitantly fond of Camino Real, calling it the closest he has come to making a philosophical statement about life." Gelb goes on to quote Williams' comments on the meaning of the play:

... that despite all contrary conditions, it is necessary to cling to romanticism, not in the sense of a weak sentimentality, but in the sense of adhering as far as you can to a gallantry, like Don Quixote's, the play is a plea for a romantic attitude toward life which can also be interpreted as a religious attitude—religious in its august, mysterious sense.

Henry Hewes says that Kazan believes that some of the confusion over Camino Real springs from the fact that the play has a unity of theme rather than the usual unity of story. Hewes goes on to quote more of Williams' pronouncements on Camino Real: "... a prayer for the wild heart kept in cages," "a picture of the state of the romantic nonconformist in modern society." The play, says Williams, gives emphasis to "honor and man's own sense of inner dignity which the Bohemian must reach after each period of degradation he is bound to run into." According to Williams the good romantic should be possessed of a "spirit of anarchy" to sustain him and to help him "not let the world drag him down to its level." In so far as the success of a play can be

50 Ibid.  
51 Ibid.  
53 Williams, quoted by Hewes, p. 25.
judged by the conformity of its themes to the author's intent, Camino Real must be judged a success. The problem seems either to arise from the play's ability to communicate these ideals to the audience or the audience's willingness to accept the message; or, perhaps, from both. Along with The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, Camino Real must be considered a commercial failure.

One additional comment by Williams sheds light on the social factors which contributed to the creation of Camino Real. Again quoted by Hewes, Williams claims "each time I return here in the United States I sense a further reduction in human liberties, which I guess is reflected in the revisions of the play." It should be noted that the final revisions and the production of Camino Real were done during the era of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the Senate un-American Activities Committee. American society was both frightened by the appalling advent of nuclear weapons, and neurotically suspicious of a supposedly vast network of Communist agents which seemed to have penetrated every facet of American life. Any attack on the governmental system or any mention of world brotherhood was subject to special scrutiny. At least one part of American society was very like the compassionless picture drawn in Camino Real.

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\[\text{Ibid., pp. 25-26.}\]
CHAPTER V

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

Ostensibly, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is about the problem of mendacity—the effects of lies and lying on the Pollit family. It also is concerned with homosexuality, the uses of sex and alcohol, inheritance, the decay of family relationships, and the dichotomy between a man's conformity to society and his conformity to his own inner sensibilities. Men of science, business, and religion are characterized; and the familiar topics of poverty, the unproductive woman, the destructive force of illusion, and survival of the fittest are also present in this play.

In Cat we see family relationships at the point of total collapse. The mendacity against which Brick has armed himself with liquor is magnified within his own family. Big Daddy is repelled by Big Mama, and so estranged are the pair that Big Mama does not realize it. Brick and Big Daddy cannot communicate until each has touched the ultimate point of mendacity within the other. Brick and Maggie are living in a marriage without sexual love, although Maggie desires it. The

1 For the purposes of this study the original version of act three, rather than the production version, will be used.

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relationship between the two brothers is one characterized
by equal parts of distaste and jealousy. Gooper's papers
which contain a plan for administering the estate are really
the diagram of a split family in which each member is guilty
of lying and some are involved in living a lie. The family--
and society—is held together by the mortar of lies. It is
the same mortar which sustains the walls separating each
member of the family from the others.

Excluding Brick and Big Mama, the characters are all
involved in a lie to protect Big Daddy from the truth about
his terminal cancer. While outwardly rejoicing at the
negative report from the clinic, Gooper, Mae, Maggie and
Reverend Tooker are each plotting to establish a favorable
position in Big Daddy's will.

Big Daddy, for his part, has been constantly living a
lie for his entire married life. He admits to Brick that
Big Mama disgusts him: "I haven't been able to stand the
sight, sound, or smell of that woman for forty years now!" 2
He is equally revolted by the necessity of pretending an
affection for Gooper and Mae and their family of "no-neck
monsters." Excluding his love for Brick and for the plan-
tation which he has built, all of Big Daddy's social and
family relationships are a lie, a concession to conformity.

2Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York,
He lives with this sort of mendacity because it is the system and there is nothing else to live with.

Big Mama lies to herself. She tries to explain the harsh and sometimes cruel remarks of Big Daddy as a result of his irritability or an attempt to tease her. It is impossible for her to give up the illusion of a strong mutual love between herself and her husband.

Gooper and Mae lie to the family in an effort to establish themselves in their parent's favor. They attempt to contrast Brick's alcoholic indifference to Gooper's sober concern for the family and the plantation. They also point up the contrast between Maggie's barren condition and Mae's fertility. While both of these points of contrast have a basis in fact, they are used to support a false conclusion: that Mae and Gooper are the more worthy of Big Daddy's love and money. They display an obsequious filial devotion which is disgusting even to their parents. In addition, Gooper and Mae seem to lie through their marriage by the production of children. Williams strongly indicates that the chief motive for the children's existence is not love but a desire to favorably impress Big Daddy. Certainly they are used for this throughout the play. All their training seems to have been directed towards the mastering of songs, verses and tricks to be displayed for Big Daddy.

Maggie, "the Cat," has grown up with mendacity. As a poor relative, she was forced to use pretence as a means of
survival. And, while she has hated pretending affection, interest and gratitude, she is familiar with the process and willing to attempt anything to secure Brick his share of the inheritance. For the benefit of the rest of the family, Maggie lives the lie of a happily married woman. She attempts to hide Brick's lack of normal sexual interest in her. Not only is she hoping to keep Big Daddy satisfied with their marriage, she is also trying to re-interest Brick, if only through habit and repeated pleading.

Brick lies to everyone by his studied pose of alcoholic indifference. Believing that he is escaping from a world filled with mendacity, and, therefore, not worth living in, Brick refuses to respond to the world any longer. He refuses to participate in the family struggle for preference; he has quit his job as a sports announcer; he withdraws from Maggie both sexually and spiritually; he refuses to offer glib comfort to his mother when she learns the truth about Big Daddy's illness. His sole interest is in drinking until he hears the "click" inside his head which signals a state of peace with the world. Once he has reached this point, it is possible for him to regain a sense of that innocence of soul which is symbolized by his athletic prowess. In a drunken attempt to repeat feats of high-school glory, Brick has broken his ankle. Thus his moral reliance on alcohol is closely paralleled by his physical dependence on a crutch.
Until the day of Big Daddy's return from the clinic, his birthday, the family continues to present their masks of lies to one another. On that day, however, the individual illusions of most of the members of the family are stripped away. Gooper and Mae are revealed not merely as greedy but as a pair of schemers as well when they present the plans for a future trust fund, already drawn up, to Big Mama. Further, when Gooper's protestations of devotion are challenged by Big Mama, he switches tactics and threatens legal action if he is not treated fairly in his father's will. Big Mama refuses to acknowledge the approaching death of Big Daddy until his painful cries impel her to search for the package of drugs which Doctor Baugh left despite her protest that "nobody's going to give Big Daddy morphine." 3

Mae, Gooper, and Maggie are surprised to find that Big Mama seems to have more initiative than they had suspected, and that the death of Big Daddy might not bring immediate wealth to any of them. Big Mama fights back against a situation that the others had taken for granted: "Nobody's goin' to take nothin'!--till Big Daddy lets go of it, and maybe, just possible, not--not even then!" 4

Maggie finds that the failure of her marriage, which she has tried to cover-up, is known to all the family. Mae and Gooper, whose room is separated from Brick and Maggie's

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3 Ibid., p. 129. 4 Ibid., p. 140.
by a thin wall, have overheard Maggie's nightly pleading with Brick, and they have reported the situation to Big Mama.

The core of the play is contained in the scene between Brick and his father, and in their mutual stripping of each other's illusions. Brick reveals the truth to Big Daddy about his physical condition. The doctor, the clinic and the family are lying to him; he is not suffering from a spastic colon, but, as he feared, from cancer; and he will not live to celebrate another birthday. If the truth is ugly and horrifying for Big Daddy, it is even more frightening for Brick. Brick has forced the truth on Big Daddy in retaliation for his father's insistence that he see the truth about himself. When Big Daddy attacks Brick for his drinking, Brick defends himself with the excuse that he is drinking to escape a world filled with mendacity. The only other escape is death, he claims. Big Daddy recognizes this as a rationalization, and a thin one at that; he challenges Brick: "I've lived with mendacity!—Why can't you live with it?"\(^5\) When mendacity proves too shallow an excuse to stop Big Daddy's questioning, Brick tries to end the conversation, but his father is adamant. He insists that, for the first time in their lives, they will have a discussion in which the important matters are named, not simply talked around, and finally avoided. So it is that

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 93.
Big Daddy forces Brick to face the central problem of his life, his relationship with Skipper.

In an earlier scene Maggie has told Brick that the mistake of her marriage was in confessing to her husband that she and Skipper had made love. She claimed that both she and her husband's friend had the same motive, "And so we made love to each other to dream it was you, both of us!" Her confession, coupled with a declaration of love from the dying Skipper, has forced Brick to see the truth in this, but he cannot accept it. Both his wife and his father are more willing to honestly view and evaluate the relationship than Brick is. Big Daddy tries to reassure Brick when he tells him that he, Big Daddy, has "lived with too much space around me to be infected by the ideas of other people. One thing you can grow on a big place more important than cotton!—is tolerance!—I grown it." Brick insists the relationship had been good, clean and beautiful until Maggie had attempted to disrupt it. But Maggie understands it better than he, and better than Skipper, too:

It was one of those beautiful, ideal things they tell about in the Greek legends, it couldn't be anything else, you being you, and that's what made it so sad, that's what made it so awful, because it was love that never could be carried through to anything satisfying or even talked about plainly. Brick, I tell you, you got to believe me, Brick, I do understand all about it! I—I think it was—noble! Can't you tell I'm sincere when I say I

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6 Ibid., p. 40. 7 Ibid., p. 104.
respect it? My only point . . . is life has got to be allowed to continue even after the dream of life is--all--over . . .

Both Big Daddy and Maggie are willing to accept the possibility of Brick's participation in a homosexual relationship, but Brick is not. When Skipper confessed to him in a drunken phone call, Brick hung up on his friend. It is not the world's mendacity but his own which sickens Brick. His wife and his father are capable of rejecting the world's standards and evaluating the individual's worth instead. Brick is not prepared to do so. The stories of the former owners of the plantation, the treatment accorded a fraternity pledge suspected of homosexual tendencies, the judgment of society, all have prepared Brick to reject Skipper, his best friend. Brick has been caught between society and himself, his own sensibilities. Because he let society dominate him, he can no longer face either himself or his world. He withholds himself from his wife, even urges her to take a lover, not because she has defiled their marriage vows but because she has defiled his relationship with Skipper. She has ruined the one pure relationship, the one great illusion in his life, and she ruined it by defining it, by naming it for what it was. In Brick's view, Maggie's definition of the relationship was the cause, not the result of its decay. Stripped of his illusion of purity, he can no longer function.

8 Ibid., p. 41.
By unquestioningly accepting and acting on society's precepts against homosexuality, Brick has denied his own inner sensibilities. As a result, he is filled with disgust for society, and more importantly, for himself as well.

Big Daddy, too, has a contempt for social conventions. He also, like Brick, has an illusion. Believing that the report from the clinic has denied his suspicion of cancer, Big Daddy plans his future life. It will be one of fulfillment, most particularly of sexual pleasure, which he has denied himself because of social pressure: "I never had me enough. I let many chances slip by because of scruples, conventions—crap . . . . All that stuff is bull, bull, bull!" But Big Daddy's illusion is short lived, and when Brick reveals the truth to him—that he is indeed, about to die—Big Daddy violently denounces the mendacity of the world. Only the living can change—this is the real pathos in Big Daddy, when he is finally at the point of changing, death overtakes him.

But Brick is still capable of change, or learning to adjust to living without illusion in a world filled with mendacity. The question Williams seems to pose is: Is it worth it? Paul Hurley examines this question in his article, "Tennessee Williams: The Playwright as Social Critic." He believes that Williams uses man's relationship to the social mores to reach a deeper problem: "Whether life should be

\[9\] Ibid., p. 77.
continued under any and all circumstances, even if the values
which govern life deprive the individual of his dignity as a
human being.\textsuperscript{10} He cites Darwinism as the source of the
belief that any condition of life is better than death, that
death is the ultimate evil. Hurley faults Big Daddy and
Maggie for accepting life as it is. Brick, on the other hand,
at least considers an alternative. Hurley suggests that
perhaps an illusion is better than reality, if one merely
accepts reality and does not attempt to change it. He indi-
cates that Williams did not intend for the audience to admire
Maggie's values or to side with her. If this is true, however,
Williams has left only Brick's alternative for the reader, and
withdrawal—to the moon or behind an alcoholic mist—has not
protected Brick from the truth and the shame which is his
recognition of it. Death is final disillusionment.

Williams' answer seems to come through the character of
Maggie. Maggie is imperfect, she is guilty of mendacity, she
has a touch of avarice in her character. She also is an
unproductive woman. Like Blanche and Laura she is incapable
of producing anything of value to society. Because they had
no male protection, Laura and Blanche were in danger of
physical extinction. Maggie has the male protection, but she
is unproductive, childless, and her personality and marriage
seem to be threatened in much the same way that the lives of

\textsuperscript{10} Paul J. Hurley, "Tennessee Williams: The Playwright
Laura and Blanche were. Having secured the most fundamental thing, life, through the protection of her husband, she is threatened with the loss of her most valued possession, the fullness of the good life, unless she becomes productive. In addition to the marriage, she will lose Brick's share of the inheritance and will be reduced again to the status of poor relation. Yet, despite all her imperfections and problems, Maggie is also the symbol of life in the real world. Like life, she is imperfect, but she is also full of potential. In the end it is Maggie who takes charge of Brick, telling him that she intends to hand him back his life because he is one of the weak and beautiful who give up too easily.

The two chief symbols in the play are the "cool moon" and the "cat on a hot tin roof." Brick and his desire to withdraw are associated with the moon symbol. It, too, is pure, withdrawn from the world, majestic in its superior position of aloofness, remote from the human struggle. Maggie and her determination to endure are associated with the "cat." Uncomfortable as her position is on the "hot tin roof" of sexual frustration, she is unwilling to abandon it. Like the cat, she will fight to maintain her territory. Brick, then, is one of Williams' favorites, the alienated. Maggie is his salvation through sexually fulfilled love. Maggie restores Brick to life in the real world, to life without impossible illusions, and to society as well. Just as Brick's life is still capable of changing, so is his society.
If Maggie has jeopardized their marriage by speaking the truth, she has attempted to save it by creating an illusion. She prematurely announces her pregnancy in the hope of securing a portion of Big Daddy's estate for Brick. But there is a great deal more motivation than mere greed on Maggie's part: she hopes to ease Big Daddy's fear of death by providing him with a symbol of immortality, a grandson whose father is Big Daddy's favorite son. She also hopes to deny the hints at homosexuality which Cooper and Mae have made concerning Brick. But most of all, she plans to restore Brick's manhood and their marriage by forcing him to co-operate with her in turning the illusion into a reality.

In the end of the play, Williams leads us to believe that Maggie's solution will work. Life is worth living because it provides an opportunity for change.

Williams also suggests, as Hurley points out, that the commonplace realities of life are often misleading and conflicting when they are closely examined. However, Williams has made an important distinction: Mendacity and illusions are destructive; ideals are not. The distinction is one based on reality or the possibility of reality. Mendacity is the evil in which society lies to the individual and individual members of the society lie to one another. Illusion is the perversion of the truth whereby the individual lies to himself and thereby creates a false impression on his society. Ideals
are not perversions of truth, but extensions of it; if not actually true at a given time, they are potentially true; they are within the realm of possibility. With such distinctions, Maggie's announcement of pregnancy must really be considered a statement of an ideal, rather than a lie. In the same way, Brick's acceptance of life at the end of the play must also be viewed as a rejection of illusion and an acceptance of idealism, of life capable of change. Maggie recognizes that life must go on even when illusion ends. It is this point that Mr. Hurley takes issue with, but the alternative seems to be that the character dies with his dream. At no point does Williams suggest that Skipper's death is preferable to Brick's life. Brick himself rejects death by turning to alcohol, a type of limbo between illusion and reality. It is Maggie who restores him to real life, filled as it is with imperfections but also, capable of change.

Williams attacks the mendacity in society by characterizing some of its representatives. Gooper and Mae are recognizable as the young business man and his wife. Gooper is completely devoted to the mores of his society. He is influential enough to suppress the story of Brick's fiasco at the high school track and he is insecure enough to have to do so. Gooper offers all the conventional comforts to Big Mama when she learns about Big Daddy's impending death, but he is unable to stay with her; he must return to his business. He allowed his whole life to be patterned by his
parents' desires because of his desire to inherit. He produced children to secure his inheritance. When it seems that his brother might be given equal or greater consideration in his father's will, he does everything in his power to discredit him. Even before Big Daddy is aware of his condition, Gooper has drawn up plans for settling the estate. For her part, Mae is the epitome of what Falk considers Williams' commonplace woman: "... a gossip, who often is seemingly as heavy in the head as in the buttocks and who forms the hopeless contrast to the heroines. These females represent the dullwitted, conventional type of housewife ..."\textsuperscript{11} Doc Baugh and Reverend Tooker, representing their respective professions, are both deceivers, hiding the truth from Big Daddy because neither science nor religion can offer anything useful to him. Doc Baugh will prolong Big Daddy's illusion through morphine, but it will only be an illusion on the physical plane; it will not blunt his perception of death, or his despair. When he leaves the house, Gooper complains that the doctor is not human enough. Reverend Tooker, who has no faith to offer Big Daddy as a shield against the horror of death, appears more despicably greedy than Gooper. He hopes that part of Big Daddy's estate will provide him with the comfort of a cooling system for his church. Failing that, a stained glass memorial window would be acceptable. Nelson

says that the character of Reverend Tooker is "one of Williams' most scathing portraits of petty viciousness in the guise of humility." In the mendacious world Reverend Tooker represents the complete antithesis of Christianity, and when the family needs someone to draw them together, he takes his leave, giving a blessing that one doubts even he believes in.

Williams implies that man's greed motivates his mendacity. Maggie's description of her childhood poverty shows that her survival was due in large part to her pretense of gratitude and affection for her rich relatives. Big Daddy introduces the topic of world-wide poverty when he tells Brick of his tour to Spain and Morocco. In Spain he found hungry children but fat priests, and, while he gave money to the children, he recognizes that it was less than he would spend to upholster a chair in his own home. In Morocco the natives were so poverty stricken that a young child of four had made sexual advances to Big Daddy at the urging of the adult who cared for her. Big Daddy seems to recognize that the greed within his family and the corruption as well have significance beyond the boundaries of his plantation. In the face of so much reality, Big Daddy had fled, just as Brick fled when his illusion was destroyed.

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Big Daddy offers some comments on the Darwinian social order in which he believes. He reminds Brick that the "human machine is not no different from the animal machine or the fish machine or the bird machine or the reptile machine or the insect machine! It's just a whole God damn lot more complicated . . . ." Further, Big Daddy, like Stanley, represents the dominant male fighting to maintain his prominence. One of the reasons he gives for having undergone the operation at the clinic is his desire to establish his health and thus stop Big Mama's gradual encroachment on his position. The struggle for favor among the members of the family when Big Daddy begins to fail parallels Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest on a more sophisticated level. The weak Brick survives because Maggie possesses enough strength for both of them. In such a social order those who do not survive find no compassion; Big Daddy has learned that the human animal is devoid of pity for others who share his mortality.

This callousness towards the plight of others is one of the characteristics of the society in Cat. Society is also depicted as a source of moral mendacity. The conventions against which Big Daddy has raged have led him to live a restricted and repressed sexual life. Moreover he has been

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13 Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 85.
forced to participate in meaningless organizations and activities, including attending church and affecting a love for Gooper and his family.

What is the answer to the problem posed by such a society? Williams explores several alternatives: withdrawal, alcohol, adjustment. Both Brick and Big Daddy have resorted to withdrawal. Big Daddy fled the country where poverty shocked him. He has insulated himself against reality with wealth. Brick withdraws from Maggie and from the family, from his job and from his own inner sensibilities just as he withdrew from Skipper. Alcohol is, at best, merely a temporary measure. It can no more negate Brick's moral responsibility than the morphine can stop Big Daddy's death—it only eases the pain. Adjustment to the world's standards is not the answer. Even though Big Daddy urges this solution on Brick, he is truly appalled when Brick describes his rejection of Skipper; nor does Big Daddy himself plan to maintain his adjustment to the world's sexual mores.

The answer which Williams advocates is to change the state of society through love. There are only three instances of honest love in the play, and in each case Brick is the object. Big Daddy loves Brick, and his love is both socially acceptable and normal; but it cannot help Brick beyond forcing him to face his problem. Big Daddy can offer no solutions to his son first, because he, himself, is doomed; and secondly, because his love
is closely limited to Brick and to the plantation. He confides to having no deep feelings for anything or anyone else. Skipper too loves Brick, and many seem to feel that this homosexual love is the dominant problem of the whole play. Hurley rejects the suggestion that homosexuality is the central problem of the play, pointing to the fact that it is neither dealt with in great detail nor is it depicted as an answer for any of the problems in the play. Hurley's last point seems open to debate. While it is true that homosexuality can not answer Brick's needs, Williams makes it clear that it cannot do so because even if Brick reciprocated Skipper's feeling, he is so much a product of his society that he would not admit it to himself. Maggie was completely accurate when she told Brick that "you being you... it was love that never could be carried through to anything satisfying or even talked about plainly." Thus, Williams seriously questions a society which designates an honest love relationship as perverted while it sanctions a completely dishonest relationship such as the one between Big Daddy and his wife.

Maggie's love is the answer which Williams accepts. Given the characters in the play, it alone is capable of being sexually fulfilling and, most importantly, of bearing fruit—both literally and figuratively—of producing change, of pointing towards an honest society.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 41.
CHAPTER VI

SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER

In Suddenly Last Summer Tennessee Williams examines the universe and finds it a cannibalistic organism. By picturing certain of its aspects—poverty, "the good life," the family, medicine, religion, social position and marriage—Williams presents a rapacious social order which has evolved into a naturalistic universe. The play represents Williams' most violent, shocking and pessimistic view of mankind.

In Mrs. Venable's attempt to protect the reputation of her dead poet-son, Williams depicts the animal mother willing to kill all threats to her young. The naturalistic element of this situation is thinly veiled with human motivations. The evolutionary world which Williams evokes with his stage setting of a well-kept jungle merely makes the story more believable, the atmosphere more consistent. The ruling pattern in modern society, as well as the universe, is survival of the fittest. The pre-historic struggle continues into modern times when mankind has enlisted the support of society's institutions in its struggle. Suddenly Last Summer seems particularly pessimistic when one realizes that most social institutions have been founded to care for the weaker
members of the social order but in this play they become the weapon of the strong who prey on the weak.

When Mrs. Venable attempts to explain her son to Dr. Cukrowicz, Williams presents a picture of society's version of the "good life." Mrs. Venable's home has an elevator and a jungle-like garden which includes rare and delicate plants. She and her son have traveled extensively, stopping at only the best watering places and collecting about them a "little court of young and beautiful people . . . ."¹ Because of his wealth, Sebastian was saved from the fate of leading a life which was only a trail of debris. Instead, he constructed each day and left behind him a "trail of days like a gallery of sculpture!"² As a poet, his work was his life; wealth had released him from any necessity to produce more than his yearly poem. Because of Mrs. Venable's position and wealth, even the poor relatives were allowed a limited share of the "good life." Mrs. Venable sponsored Catharine's debut, George was given Sebastian's clothing and he has enjoyed a successful rush from the best fraternities. Mrs. Venable is even paying for Catharine's care in a private institution, and she is willing to pay for Catharine's continued treatment. She has proposed a grant for Dr. Cukrowicz if he will silence Catharine with a lobotomy. Like Big Daddy, Mrs. Venable is

²Ibid., p. 27.
able to protect the good life with wealth. The Holly family, and the Doctor, are willing—in varying degrees—to help her protect her privileges for the reward of sharing them.

In contrast to the "good life" Williams offers several pictures of poverty. Mrs. Venable describes her disgust at Sebastian's decision to look for God in a Buddhist monastery where the vow of poverty bound him to eat rice from a wooden bowl and sit on a grass mat. When he decided to endow the monastery with his wealth, she had his bank accounts frozen. The Holly family is impoverished, relying on the Venables for support. World poverty is described by Catharine as she recalls the "bands of homeless young people that lived on the free beach like scavenger dogs, hungry children . . . ." In each individual case of poverty the poor have been corrupted by the rich. The hungry children accepted Sebastian's tips in return for allowing him to fulfill his sexual needs. The doctor, too, is beset by financial problems: he needs a new ward for his special patients, salary money to hire assistants, and enough money for himself to get married. Yet he expresses shock at the thought that Mrs. Venable is attempting to bribe him to perform a lobotomy. Mrs. Venable, recognizing the powerful combination of wealth and greed, makes his choice clear for him: "Now if my honesty's shocked you--pick up your little black bag without the subsidy in it, and run away

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3 Ibid., p. 78.
from this garden!" He stays. In the same way the Hollys are concerned with settling Sebastian's will, not with the threat of destruction hanging over Catharine. The family's objection to Catharine's removal to "Lion's View" is not that a lobotomy will be performed, but that it is a state hospital and not a prestigious private institution. George protests that "Everyone in the Garden District would know you'd put your niece in a state asylum, Aunt Vi." The power of wealth corrupts the rich, the greed for it corrupts the poor; moreover poverty strips man of dignity as well as making him vicious.

Disintegrating family ties are the most obvious and the most revolting example of the world's corruption. Not only are the Hollys willing to abandon Catharine to Mrs. Venable's plans, they even accuse her of selfishness for not retracting her story and thus expediting the filing of the will. At a time of extreme peril for one of their members they can think of nothing more essential to discuss than George's rush season and new clothing. Mrs. Venable is quick to make it clear that the Hollys are not blood relatives, they are related only through marriage, and marriage for Mrs. Venable has been a very weak relationship. In what she describes as the hardest decision of her life, she has elected to protect Sebastian's financial interests rather than return home to

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4 Ibid., p. 32. 5 Ibid., p. 59.
her dying husband. Her relationship to the forty-year old Sebastian is also suspect. Catharine believes that both she and Mrs. Venable were used by Sebastian as procurors for his sex partners. Dr. Cukrowicz is startled by the close relationship between mother and son and by Mrs. Venable’s insistence on Sebastian's chastity. Moreover, Sebastian labored for nine months each year to deliver his poem. A perverted and subtle type of incest is hinted at here. The dominating and possessive mother (male-figure) loves her homosexual son (female-figure), and through her love makes it possible for her son to "deliver" every nine months (reinforcement of female-son identification) a poem (or child). Mother and son have been accepted in society in much the same way that husband and wife normally are, and Mrs. Venable glories in the fact.

The medical profession is also corrupted. Mrs. Venable has proved it is open to considering a tempting bribe. Dr. Cukrowicz needs the right kind of patients to experiment on; because of the risk involved with a lobotomy he has found it difficult to secure any patients except the "criminal psychopaths that the State turns over to us . . . ." During her stay in the expensive private hospital, Catharine has been subjected more to punishment than to treatment. To stop her babbling they have given her electric and drug shock. When

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6 Ibid., p. 29.
she became frightened and tried to attract the attention of passing cars in order to get a message to her family, she was deprived of her yard privileges. She has been forced to eat food she does not like; she is forbidden to smoke; and she is threatened with confinement in the violent ward if she offers any resistance to the rules. Catharine tells her family that patients are sent to the beauty parlor when they are going to meet the outside world, but at other times they look "awful" because such items as compact or lipstick are forbidden. The very name "Lion's View" suggests the rapacious threat the institution poses to its inmates.

Sister Felicity represents both the medical world and the world of organized religion. She wavers between being a petty tyrant--forbidding smoking, restricting Catharine's movements--and being really cruel. She threatens Catharine and she hints pointedly about the projected lobotomy. Her moments of compassion are limited to Catharine's obedient periods.

Sebastian, too, was a religious figure of sorts. He believed that when he witnessed the slaughter of new-born sea turtles by birds he had seen the face of God. Mrs. Venable accepted this nihilistic view of the universe. Sebastian had quickly given up his Buddhist monastery and returned to the good life, though his mother claims he spent much of his life looking for a clear image of God. Catharine seems to express Williams' view of religion in general when she says, "We're
all of us children in a vast kindergarten trying to spell
God's name with the wrong alphabet blocks."  

There is some slight suggestion throughout the play that
Sebastian may be a Christ figure and that Violet might
represent the Virgin Mary. In a conversation with the Doctor,
Mrs. Venable tells him that Sebastian wanted his work recog-
nized after his death. Williams' stage directions call for
Mrs. Venable to lift "a thin gilt-edged volume from the patio-
table as if elevating the Host before the altar."  

At the
same time she says: "... Here is my son's work, Doctor,
here's his life going on!"  

He lived a celibate life and
often dismissed people because they lacked purity of attitude.
His mother was the only person who really satisfied the demands
he made of people. Catharine claimed that he refused her
efforts to save his life because he saw himself as a kind of
sacrifice to a cruel god, and his death was the completion
of this image. He was a man who accepted all, and, though
he knew what was right and what was awful, he never attempted
to change these conditions. In the scene which Catharine
describes of his death, he elects to go up the hill to the
death which he knows awaits him. Moreover, Sebastian's white
suit, the white heat of the day and the white hill seem
designed to evoke a mood of sacrificial purity and consuming

7Ibid., p. 40.  8Ibid., p. 17.
9Ibid.
heat. Perhaps, given the god of *Suddenly Last Summer*, Sebastian is a fitting Christ-figure. This god is a cruel and rapacious destroyer, devouring the weak without pity or reason, and the strong in society pattern their lives after him. The only relief from this pessimistic view of God is Catharine's suggestion that even God lacks the power to change the truth.

Catharine, like Sebastian, is a victim of the universal cannibalism. Betrayed by a married man who used her for momentary sexual diversion, Catharine experienced such great loneliness that she came to love cousin Sebastian simply because he liked her. Without Segastian's protection, Catharine was the familiar dependent female, her own survival now in question. Her only hope is to claim the protection of Dr. Cukrowicz. Before her betrayal she had been strong enough to laugh at the pretentious members of society. After her betrayal she found that the man involved was protected by his social standing, and it was she who was punished by being dropped from the lists of the socially desirable. Because of her experiences she has formed a pragmatic view of love: "... we all use each other and that's what we think of as love, and not being able to use each other is what's--hate ...!"

Mrs. Venable, attempting to silence Catharine's version of Sebastian's death by destroying Catharine's mind,

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10 Ibid., p. 61.
is using the very social institution designed to protect
human life.

Sebastian's view of human life was very like that of the
Renaissance princes to whom his mother compared him. He was
elegant in dress and manner and so aloof from the world that
he himself set the type and printed his poetry, lest he be
exposed to the vulgarity of fame during his lifetime. This
he considered part of the "good life." As for other people,
he was a snob:

My son, Sebastian, was not a family snob or a money
snob but he was a snob, all right. He was a snob
about personal charm in people, he insisted upon
good looks . . . he always had a little entourage
of the beautiful and the talented and the young! 11

He was a detached, superior being who made no effort to change
the world in which he lived. He was obedient only to some
inner direction. Other people existed for his use. Though
he seemed tied to his mother by the "string of pearls that
old mothers hold their sons by like a--sort of . . . umbilical
cord," 12 he discarded her when her age and physical condition
no longer made her suitable bait. He was capable of eating
on one side of a fence which held back the band of beggar
children upon whom he preyed, and, while they looked hungrily
on, of warning Catharine not to look at them: "Beggars are
a social disease in this country. If you look at them, you

11 Ibid., p. 23. 12 Ibid., p. 74.
get sick of the country, it spoils the whole country for you . . . .

Sebastian has used the beggar children in much the same way that Mrs. Venable plans to use Dr. Cukrowicz; each of them recognizes the power of the rich to buy the moral scruples of the poor. Sebastian believed he had seen the face of god as he watched the flesh-eating birds of the Encantadas swoop down "on the hatched sea-turtles, turning them over to expose their soft undersides, tearing the underside open and rending and eating their flesh." But this is not only Sebastian's view of god, it is also a view of the whole society. The poor are devoured by the rich, both physically and spiritually. Catharine is about to be devoured by Mrs. Venable's hatred and Dr. Cukrowicz; the family seems willing to permit this in order to get Sebastian's inheritance. Although at the end of the play George, Catharine's brother, offers to quit school and get a job rather than to subject Catharine to a lobotomy, the Doctor's comment that "we ought at least to consider the possibility that the girl's story could be true," seems to fall short of any real cause for optimism for Catharine's future. In fact, Catharine's best hope lies in the possibility that Mrs. Venable will either die or, perhaps, go mad before the operation can be performed. Either Catharine or Mrs. Venable

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13 Ibid., p. 80.  
14 Ibid., p. 88.
will be destroyed. This seems to be the whole pattern of life in *Suddenly Last Summer*.

The entire play is permeated with allusions to cannibalism in one form or another. The setting of a "well kept jungle" recalls the time when developing creatures first crawled up from the sea. At this point the Darwinian principal of survival of the strong and destruction of the weak began to operate. Society has altered the meanings of "strong" and "weak" so that the physical attributes of an individual are not always the prime consideration in determining who is weak and who is strong. Money and social position are more desirable than physical prowess today. The attack of the birds on the young turtles being equated in the mind of Sebastian with the activity of god in the universe is an example of the type of metaphysical cannibalism Williams envisions as the result of a type of human spiritual cannibalism. Dr. Cukrowicz's name means "sugar" in Polish, and is suggestive of eating. The name "Lion's View" suggests the rapacious aspect of the hospital's function: the lobotomy will be an act of cannibalism in which Mrs. Venable has been able to enlist the support of society. Catharine, in describing Sebastian's restlessness, comments that he "talked about people, as if they were—items on a menu."\(^{15}\) The children who pursued Sebastian were described as resembling

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 40.
plucked birds, much like the birds of the Encantadas. As the beggar children watched Sebastian eat, they made a "gobbling noise," and shouted the word for "bread." When he left the protection of the restaurant, they not only killed him, they devoured parts of him. Shocking as the physical fact of cannibalism is, as Catharine reveals it, it is consistent with the relationships which Williams describes throughout the play. When Catharine's mother objects to the horror of the story, Catharine replies: "I DIDN'T invent it. I know it's a hideous story but it's a true story of our time and the world we live in . . . ."\textsuperscript{16}

Jackson believes that Williams is exploring the problem of "inhumanity supported by social, political, and intellectual advantages. In \textit{Suddenly Last Summer} he demonstrates that intelligence and morality are not necessarily properties of the same function."\textsuperscript{17} Society is depicted as a rapacious organism, a compilation of evil individual relationships. The helpless are made prey by the powerful, the poor by the rich. Charity becomes a method of keeping the weak dependent. The Southern traditions of gallantry are laughable in a world where a married man whose wife is expecting a baby can destroy a girl emotionally and be protected from blame simply

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 47.

\textsuperscript{17}Ester Merle Jackson, \textit{The Broken World of Tennessee Williams} (Madison & Milwaukee, 1965), p. 146.
because he has social standing. The very existence of the type of wealth that the Venables enjoy and the degrading poverty of the beggar children seems an adequate indictment of the society. Medicine, the profession man believes is devoted to his welfare, is in reality a punitive and threatening instrument open to control by the powerful or rich. Like medicine, religion seems to lack any truly humanistic quality. Family relationships provide no protection for the individual and are characterized more by greed than anything else. *Suddenly Last Summer* depicts a completely naturalistic world in which cannibalism exists not only as a physical fact, but as a characteristic of human relationships as well. Williams sets the atmosphere of a pre-historic jungle in which plant leaves resemble human organs still dripping with blood. He seems to suggest that man's cannibalistic tendencies have evolved with him and that just as the natural world feeds upon itself, so does mankind. The first rule of evolution, survival of the strong, still operates today in human relationships. Further, man's individual greed and rapaciousness has infected the universe itself. Man's metaphysical surroundings as well as his physical surroundings are cannibalistic. His god is very like Sebastian who knows always what is right and what is wrong, but who never moves to change his world, who preys upon the weak from a safe position of aloof power. Stripped of his religious faith in a beneficent God and disillusioned
by the failure of his social institutions, man must face the encroachment of a naturalistic universe which is an enlarged projection of his own nature. Clearly he is in danger of extinction.
Although human loneliness has been a major theme in all of Tennessee Williams' plays, The Night of the Iguana is his major study of this topic. The problem of man's alienation from his fellows is traced through his relationships to others, to society, to the international community, and, finally, to the universe and its God.

In the play, the proprietor and all the guests of the Costa Verde hotel are in a desperate situation. They are either physically, emotionally or morally bankrupt, and Shannon, the central character of the play, has reached the end of his rope in all areas.

Maxine Faulk, the proprietor of the Mexican hotel, is desperate for male companionship. Although she has been a widow for only a few months, she has been lonely for a considerable time. Her husband, ten years her senior, had lost sexual interest in her; he remained completely indifferent even when she took one of the employees as a casual lover. The affair with the young beach-boy has been unsatisfying to Maxine because paid lovers lose the respect which is essential to any meaningful relationship. Further, Maxine's loneliness has not been confined to sex; all
communication between her and her husband, Fred, had been reduced to a series of grunts. Though they remained married until his death, Maxine no longer felt any sense of community with her husband. His indifference, which took the form of tolerance and patience, was insulting to her. Maxine is desperate to reaffirm her own identity by sharing it with someone who can love her, and she sets out to seduce Shannon, an old friend of her husband. But in addition to sexual gratification, she offers him security, an alternative to death, protection in a violent world.

Shannon is even more desperate when he arrives at the hotel. He recognizes the signs of an oncoming mental breakdown; he is fighting his tendency toward alcoholism; and he is being threatened by "the spook," his private devil of guilt and repression, whose appearance signals the onset of emotional and mental collapse. He realizes that he is about to lose his job as a guide for Blake Tours, the lowest rung on that ladder which he has descended, one defeat at a time, since he left the ministry. The loss of his present job means that this area of employment will be closed to him; he can descend no lower. His only alternatives, at this point, are a return to the church and suicide. Not only is he financially destitute, he is also being charged with statutory rape, so that his return to the United States seems impossible. Shannon seems to be at the end of his struggle for survival.
Charlotte Goodall, the sixteen year girl who has become involved with Shannon, also seems desperate; but her desperation is that adolescent passion for experience and sexual excitement which is normal for her age, even if she is less than conventionally restrained in expressing it.

Charlotte's guardian, Miss Fellowes, also comes to the hotel in a desperate condition. Her first problem is that, as leader of the tour clients, she finds herself stranded miles from the town where the tourists are scheduled to stay. Shannon refuses to take them to the hotel where they have reservations, and insists that they remain at the Costa Verde. Convinced that Shannon is receiving a "kickback" from Maxine and furious because most of the party has come down with dysentery as a result of Shannon's tampering with the tour's itinerary, she is adamant about leaving. But Shannon has discerned the real source of her desperation; she has a deep lesbian attachment to Charlotte. Although the girl is unaware of it, her promiscuity with Shannon has aroused jealousy as well as censure on the part of her guardian. Miss Fellowes' growing determination to separate Shannon and Charlotte is highly emotional.

When Miss Fellowes and Shannon confront one another, a verbal battle ensues during which Miss Fellowes insults Shannon by calling him a defrocked minister. Unrealistically hopeful of still salvaging his job at this point, and perhaps
also because he is too ill to defend himself, Shannon endures the insult. It drives him to the edge of hysteria and he is forced to voice his pain: "Don't! Break! Human! Pride!"\(^1\)

When Shannon has reached this edge of desperation, another pair of guests appear, and they, too, are desperate. Hannah Jelkes and her grandfather, Nonno, arrive. He is in a wheelchair and she is pushing him through the rainforest. They could not afford the help of a taxi driver to push the old man up the hill. Nor have they yet found a hotel which will take them in. Maxine refuses at first when she learns they are destitute, but when Hannah tells her "I'm afraid I have to place myself at your ... mercy,"\(^2\) Maxine relents for one night. Not only are they penniless, but Nonno has reached that point of exhaustion which, in a man of ninety-seven, means death. A minor poet, he is struggling to complete his last poem before death overtakes him.

The only people at Casta Verde who are not desperate are the German guests, Herr Fahrenkopf and his family. It is through them that Williams gives the play its historical and political setting. They sing Nazi songs and listen with growing glee to the shortwave broadcasts of the Battle of Britain. Glowing with health, they are enjoying the wealth


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 37.
which Herr Fahrenkopf's tank factory provides. Herr Fahrenkopf's national pride and admiration of scientific achievement is unbounded when he describes with joy the "superfirebombs" which can be delivered nightly as part of the German effort. Of all the characters in the play, only the Germans are free of the desperation of alienation. Perhaps because they are a family and a nationality as well, forming their own enclave, they alone seem to have a secure place in the world. Such security is impossible for Shannon, Mrs. Faulk, Miss Fellowes, and Charlotte Goodall because they are all alienated from one another by their inability to communicate.

Shannon has commented early in the play that "It's horrible how you have to bluff and keep bluffing even when hollering 'Help!'."\(^3\) When he does yell "Help!" by confessing to Miss Fellowes that his life is cracking up, she demands to know how this can compensate the members of the tour. A lack of communication is closely linked with a lack of compassion. The thought that compensation could be more important to a human being than the survival of another leads Shannon to lose his remaining faith in human goodness. His confession only evokes more insults to his already dissolving dignity.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 21.
Recognizing that he is in no position to commit himself to anyone, Shannon finds communication with Maxine impossible; all Maxine's comments are attempts to seduce him; all his responses are efforts to fend her off. Nor can Shannon communicate with Charlotte through words. He cannot repel her, nor can he make her realize how desperate his situation is. His only recourse is to hide in his cubicle. But, most tragic of all, he cannot communicate through sex in any adequate way. He has an abnormal attraction to young girls based on a Freudian childhood experience. His mother has punished him for masturbation, telling him that it made God as angry as it made her, and she was punishing him so that God would not punish him more severely later. Maxine sees the incident as the root of his present problem: "... you harbored a secret resentment against Mama and God for making you give it up. And so you got back at God by preaching atheistical sermons ... and at Mama by starting to lay young girls." Not only does Shannon have a penchant for young girls, he finds it impossible to suppress his Puritanical nature enough to have an enjoyable and guiltless sexual encounter. In the two incidents he describes, he has physically punished the girls by hitting them and forcing them to pray with him for forgiveness immediately after the encounter. His ability to communicate sexually is seriously impaired by his overwhelming guilt.

Ibid., p. 81.
His ability to communicate within the limits of his Ministry was destroyed when he preached a sermon on the Sunday following his seduction of a young Sunday-school teacher. Throwing away his prepared conciliatory sermon, he launched on a tirade describing the "senile delinquent" that his conservative congregation recognized as god. When the congregation walked out, he followed them, shouting his vision of their truth.

Finally, Shannon can no longer communicate with God. His own personal image of God is quite different from that accepted by society. Society believes in a God who is, in fact, a senile delinquent. Moreover, society uses its God as an excuse to perpetrate acts of greed and brutality. Shannon, on the other hand, believes in a God of Lightning and Thunder, "His oblivious majesty." Shannon's God is a purely naturalistic one, indifferent to and unaware of mankind. Communication with this image is impossible. He can be talked about, but not to.

If the failure to communicate and to find compassion can lead men to insanity and suicide, it can lead nations into war. The lack of love, compassion, and communication signifies an unstable and corrupting situation in the universe. Two unstable nations "can set a whole world on fire, can blow it up, past repair, and that is just as true between two people ... ."\(^5\) Shannon tells Charlotte.

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 49.
Nonno, too, is finding his avenues of communication severely blocked by his age and his health. He must expand a great deal of his dwindling energy to carry on a conversation, and the effort to concentrate long enough to work on his poem calls for endurance and courage. But, for all his problems with communication, Nonno has what Shannon, Charlotte, Miss Fellowes and Mrs. Faulk lack—love. Hannah, his granddaughter, has provided him with an emotional "nest" which is a more meaningful home than any of the others can claim.

In the insecure and relativistic universe which Williams has constructed in Iguana, Hannah is the only suggestion of hope that man will prevail. She is the symbol of absolute values in a world where everything is relative. Walter Kerr describes her as a self-possessed heroine who is filled with "suppressed warmth" and "leashed radiance, that glows within a composed facade but is forbidden to display itself or spend itself . . . ." Hannah's compassionate aloofness, her chastity, her devotion to her grandfather, and particularly her calm refusal to be disgusted by anything human suggest that she may be considered a Mary-figure whose word of compassion will save Shannon, if not the world. When she finds no room in the hotel for non-paying guests, she asks Maxine for mercy, and the

proprietor responds even though she is jealous of Hannah. Though desperate herself, Hannah intuitively understands the panic which Shannon feels. She is able to accept financial ruin because she knows she will keep on going, not even tempted to suicide. Her security is not shaken, and she helps Shannon rebuild his as far as he is able. She alone believes that Shannon may one day return to his church, but this time to preach peaceful and compassionate sermons rather than the violent rebellion against a savage god. Hannah's acceptance of the concept of contradiction with truth makes it possible to accept reality and fantasy as one unified experience. In the same way, and for the same reason, she can accept a sexual perversion as an act of love, and, hence, worthy human expression, rather than condemning it as a disgusting deviation. Williams twice describes Hannah's appearance as being saint-like, and Shannon calls her a "female Buddha." She has escaped one of the corruptions of the flesh: she is able to separate love from sex. Her two love experiences have given her neither sexual pleasure nor prudish guilt. Maxine tells Shannon that she knows the difference between sleeping with someone and loving someone, but it Hannah who can be satisfied with a life of love alone. When Shannon suggests that they travel together, Hannah gently leads him to see the impossibilities of the situation. Though she rejects him sexually, Shannon is moved to tell Hannah that she is a lady, a real one and a great one.
Williams has established her as his one heroine who adheres to the traditional values of the old school, but who is still able to live in the current world.

In her efforts to save Shannon, Hannah tells him that many people may torture each other, but that they also help one another if they are decent. Although she claims that as an artist she only observes and draws people and does not attempt to judge them, she is able to help Shannon to some degree of self knowledge by pointing out that his attempts to act out a painless crucifixion for atonement are unconvincing. Like someone trapped in a tunnel, Shannon can be saved only if he works himself out of his own introspective world by concentrating on the needs of others.

Hannah correctly assesses Shannon's problem as the need to believe in someone or something. Such a belief is the source of individual endurance, and it is endurance which finally determines whether or not man will survive in the universe. To Hannah, endurance means the ability to accept what one cannot change. She herself has traveled through the shadowy side of life and of her own soul, and in her ability to accept as love experiences two unusual sexual encounters, she has proven that endurance leads man to compassion and understanding. The source of Hannah's endurance is not a belief in God: in fact, she appears to share Shannon's view of God. Hannah believes in humanity's ability to save itself. In a short exchange with Shannon,
Hannah gives Williams' prescription for curing man's alienation:

Hannah: Broken gates between people so they can reach each other, even if it's just for one night only.

Shannon: One night stands, huh?

Hannah: One night ... communications between them on a verandah outside their ... separate cubicles, Mr. Shannon.

Shannon: You don't mean physically, do you?

Hannah: No.

Shannon: I didn't think so. Then what?

Hannah: A little understanding exchanged between them, a wanting to help each other through nights like this. 7

When, at Hannah's request, Shannon frees the captive Iguana, he is motivated by this understanding and desire to help. He has accepted the fact that if God is not beneficient man must be: "Now Shannon is going to go down there with his machete and cut the damn lizard loose so it can run back to its bushes because God won't do it ... ." 8

This oblivious God is the dominant force in a naturalistic universe which poses a constant threat to man's survival. The society which man has evolved parallels such a universe; it is marked by a lack of communication and compassion.

8Ibid., p. 122.
One of the social evils which Williams examines is the indifferent attitude one individual has towards another. Miss Fellowes is unconcerned about Shannon's struggle to survive; she is concerned only with monetary compensation for the altered tour itinerary. Her motives in having Shannon fired and in having charges of statutory rape brought against him are purely punitive. In an abortive effort to maintain his human dignity after Miss Fellowes' accusations, Shannon is forced to hide behind his clerical garb. Fred has considered Maxine's love affairs a matter of total indifference to him, and he had made no effort to really communicate with his wife for several years. Hannah and Nonno, despite the latter's infirm condition and advanced age, were unable to find a room until Hannah appealed to Maxine's mercy. Maxine feels humiliated by her paid lovers because they have lost respect for her. Charlotte, though she believes herself to be in love with Shannon, selfishly refuses to help him survive by leaving him alone.

As Shannon tells Charlotte, individual problems can be magnified into national problems. Men have no desire to see below the surface either of different individuals or of different cultures, and so tourists travel, demanding to live just as they have at home. Some men rejoice when cities burn and bombs fall. Nationality is more important to them than humanity.
The sick, the poor and the dying of all nations, however, share similar fates. Shannon is forced to hock his most precious possession, his cross, in order to sustain life. Maxine tries to send Nonno and Hannah to a miserable rooming house. Hannah describes an oriental hospital for the penniless dying. Brought to the hospital by their destitute relatives, great crowds of them keep a communal death watch, with no hope and little dignity. Shannon describes the pile of excrement through which the hungry scavenge for bits of undigested food.

Man's poverty is spiritual as well as physical. Society has created a god in the image of a peevish old man who destroys the jigsaw puzzle which he cannot solve. One reason for Shannon's having been locked out of his church was his description of God as a "senile delinquent," unworthy of man's praise and worship. Moreover, man has used God for his own vicious purposes. Shannon cites Mexico as an example of a country "destroyed in its flesh and corrupted in its spirit by its gold-hungry Conquistadors that bore the flag of the Inquisition along with the Cross of Christ."9

The concept of God which society perpetuates is that of vengeful and repressive one. Maxine indicates that it is because of Shannon's mother's belief in such a God that he is sexually guilt-ridden. While his rebellion against

9Ibid., p. 57.
repression has led him to have multiple affairs with young girls, he must still pay a price for his guilt. Immediately following each encounter, he punishes the girl physically and directs her to join him in praying for forgiveness. Men enjoy pain and enjoy inflicting it, yet they cannot enjoy sex without guilt because it is impossible to be completely emancipated from their Puritan repressions. Maxine understands the complexities of man's need for sexual fulfillment and his desire to appear to subscribe to the mores of his society; she considers starting a profitable business by providing a private place for casual love affairs between businessmen and their secretaries.

In Iguana man's society is morally and spiritually bankrupt. Through the character of Shannon, Williams offers man what he considers to be the only possible alternatives: death, lunacy, or acceptance. Shannon is fleeing from lunacy when he arrives at the hotel. The threat of insanity is his "spook." Shannon does seriously consider the possibility of the long suicidal "swim to China." In a world where man is constantly threatened by extinction suicide may seem merely an anticipation of the inevitable. But through Hannah, Williams affirms the desirability of life. If society is corrupt, it is merely an extension of individual corruption; if man is capable of improvement, so is his society. Through the character of Hannah and through her beliefs, Williams extols the worth of human life.
Human beings, their society and their universe may not be capable of perfection, but they are capable of being improved. Life is preferable to death, Williams tells us, and by accepting what cannot be changed the universal threat of extinction will be thwarted; man will endure.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

If Tennessee Williams were less skilled as a writer, the social content of his works would be more evident; but so powerful are his abilities to create dialogue and to involve the reader with the plight of an individual character that his social criticism is diminished in clarity and force. This is particularly true if only one play is considered. But when a number of plays are examined, a pattern of his criticism becomes quite apparent. William Beyer comments that the "veracity and pertinence of his [Williams'] characterization permit him to expand his themes to the point where a significant social comment is implied." In the six plays under consideration Williams has shown society to be a source of growing frustration to humanity in its struggle for survival.

In depicting mankind's problems with society, Williams has chosen the character of the "alien" or the "fugitive" to symbolize the thoughtful and sensitive elements in humanity. Although all of Williams' aliens have much more

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significance than mere symbols of resistance to society, Eric Bentley observes that they all share a "fear of the Other, of society . . . ." Not only are Williams' alienated characters afraid of society, they have already broken some—if not all—of their social ties. Because of their unique position as outsiders, they can make meaningful judgments about the world from which they are withdrawing; in fact, they are the only ones who can, for, as James Roberts points out, "if one depends entirely upon the society in which one lives for a sense of reality and identity, it is impossible to take a stand against that society without reducing oneself to nothingness in the process."  

Williams' characters have depended on society, but they have found it lacking, even threatening. If his characters are not taking a stand against their society, they are at least withdrawing from it. These disillusioned idealists are finally forced to see the world as Williams sees it, and his is a bleak view.

The twentieth century world, Williams tells us, is one in which a civilized society is being overpowered by a naturalistic social order. The old traditions of positive and absolute social and moral values often symbolized by

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the old South, are no longer accepted as a basis for living in our industrialized world. Amanda lamented the fact that she was unprepared for her future. Laura and Blanche were equally unprepared; their standards were not compatible with the new opportunistic standards; their individuality, charm, and ideals were points of vulnerability rather than defenses. Kilroy's innocence literally made him the perfect "patsy," and so frightened was he by the world around him that he was willing to cooperate in his own humiliation. Like Kilroy, Catharine Holly was betrayed by her innocence. A young girl more in love with romance than with an individual person, she found in one night that society will protect the powerful rather than the betrayed innocent. In attempting to escape from Camino Real, Lord Byron recognized that modern society had induced him to betray his art by substituting luxury and ease for purity and vision. In fact, as Gassner points out, all of the literary figures in Camino Real are significant because they are "associated with defiance of convention and with romance." Of equal significance is the fact that they are all characters in a fantasy, and their victories—large or small—over society have a quality of fantasy about them. No matter how noble the withdrawal of Byron, Quixote, and Kilroy may seem within the confines of Camino Real, in the real world

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Williams suggests that those who withdraw will ultimately share the fate of Laura and Blanche. They are the only two characters in realistic plays who reach the state of complete withdrawal.

The idealists in Williams' plays find that the real world is no longer concerned with beauty, quality, purity, and love. Instead, it is a naturalistic society in which survival is determined by money and power. In *The Glass Menagerie* Tom notes that the world is about to be lit by lightning. In *Iguana* Shannon finds his religious beliefs centered about a God of thunder and lightning. In both cases, Williams seems to be pointing up a universe of indifference or hostility. Until the hopeful message of *Iguana*, Williams seems to have been saying that man can only protect himself by acquiring money and power. Laura and Blanche are both lost in such a society because they have no way to acquire either. It is for such a society that Jim prepares himself with his course in public speaking; it is a cheap society in which quality is not as important as appearances. Even though Jim is kind to Laura and seems to have some feeling for her, his abandonment of her is inevitable; she does not have the motivation, the "right connections," the "knowledge--Zzzzzp! money--Zzzzzp!-power!" to get to the top. Laura has no more chance for survival in this world than does her unicorn, and Jim knows it. Even if he were not engaged, he would abandon her; she would be a liability in a
world where only the strong survive. The conflict between Stanley and Blanche in *Streetcar* is merely a more violent statement of the social revolution which marked the end of traditional values and the beginning of a social order dominated entirely by wealth and power. The Mexican vendor's cry of "Flowers for the dead" is as prophetic for Blanche's society as it is for her individual destiny. The Street-cleaners who resemble civil servants in *Camino Real* as well as the medical instructor who discourses over Kilroy's corpse are perfect examples of society's indifference to the individual. Brick's relationship with Skipper has been unique and so is unacceptable in a naturalistic society which demands conformity as one of the prices for survival. Big Daddy and Sebastian, both rich men, have identical reactions to abject poverty; they flee. They understand that only wealth can insure survival in our society. That both of them, despite their wealth, die agonizing deaths merely underscores the fact that society is only the reflection of an inexorable universe where their wealth provides no protection. Because of her wealth, Mrs. Venable is able to use society and its institutions in her plot to destroy Catharine Holly. Nonno's poem describes a world in which all beauty is subject to corruption, in which nothing that touches earth can escape destruction. Shannon believes in a naturalistic god and universe, and Hannah agrees with him.
Williams' depiction of social institutions is consistent throughout the six plays. The church, the family, medicine, government, education, and business are all found to be more detrimental than helpful to man. Kilroy feels that God is experimenting with mankind and that organized religion, rather than establishing communication between man and God, has merely created a "mumbo-jumbo" which put God to sleep. Kilroy presents the only positive statement about organized religion which can be found in the six plays when he describes the YMCA as a type of Protestant church which does good in the community, but its social aspect rather than its religious character is its virtue. Sebastian has searched around the world, even entered a monastery, to find some answer in organized religion to the dreadful vision of a naturalistic god who was symbolized by the devouring sea birds as they preyed on the new-born turtles. Organized religion could not supply Sebastian with an answer. The nun responsible for Catharine Holly alternated between tyranny and charity, yet she took no moral stand about the proposed lobotomy, and even used it as a threat in an effort to control Catharine. Big Daddy found church services something to be endured; in fact, his Puritan background was a barrier to a fulfilled sexual life for him. Granted a reprieve from death, he completely forsook the Puritan morality and planned to "have a ball." When he was finally confronted with death, the church failed to offer him either comfort or hope. Instead,
Reverend Tooker, vulture-like, waited for Big Daddy's demise, hoping that it would bring with it a new air conditioner. Shannon, a one-time minister who was locked out of his church, is choked by his restricting clerical collar and finds that he can no longer bear to wear the cross about his neck. He feels that the very spirit of the country has been corrupted by the "gold-hungry Conquistadors that bore the flag of the Inquisition along with the Cross of Christ."^5 Further, Shannon believes that "all our theologies . . . accuse God of being a cruel, senile delinquent, blaming the world and brutally punishing all he created for his own faults in construction . . . ."^6

If religion has failed man, so has the family, according to Williams. The old concepts of permanence in marriage and loyalty to the clan are disappearing from society. Amanda has been deserted by her husband. Tom rejects his responsibility to his mother and sister and sets off in search of adventure. Blanche, who maintained her loyalty to the clan through sickness and death, and who impoverished herself in order to provide care for the distant members of her family, is raped by her brother-in-law after he has foiled her last attempt to survive by disclosing her past to Mitch. In the end, she is committed to a mental

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^6Ibid., p. 56.
hospital by her sister. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, each member of the Pollit family is estranged from the other and the whole family life is characterized by mendacity, jealousy and greed. Catharine Holly's mother and brother are perfectly willing to sacrifice Catharine's mind for Sebastian's legacy. Sebastian has used both his mother and his cousin as procurers for him. The whole relationship between Mrs. Venable and her son is one of psychological and sexual perversion. Fred and Maxine in *Iguana* had not had a conversation in two years. The only completely wholesome family relationship in the six plays is that of Nonno and Hannah in *Iguana*, but this, in itself, is not a usual family relationship since it is one between an aging poet and his spinster granddaughter.

Medicine, too, is failing mankind. The medical instructor who lectures over Kilroy's corpse is the end product of science without humanity. No dignity is left to the dead when their abnormal physical organs are preserved for display in a museum. In *Cat* neither Doc Baugh nor the clinic is willing to confront Big Daddy with the truth about his situation. Medicine can only blunt the pain for Big Daddy, it cannot save him from death. Gooper complains that Doc Baugh is not human enough, and this seems to be Williams' total view of medicine—it has become callous to man's pain. Dr. Sugar is open to Mrs. Venable's bribery. Catharine's description of the treatment in the mental institution calls
up visions of a torture chamber rather than a hospital ward. The choice of "Lion's View" as a name for a hospital seems to state clearly that such places prey on victims rather than cure patients. The lobotomy itself is at least equal to death in the case of Catharine Holly, but Williams seems to convey the idea that even a death as cruel as Sebastian's has more dignity, and is therefore preferable to the vegetable-like existence of lobotomy patients.

For Williams, formal education seems to be a completely useless aspect of society. Laura, both in high school and in the business college, has been totally incapable of facing the stress of competition. Jim's public speaking course is designed to give the impression of education rather than anything more fundamental. For Brick, college was an opportunity to play games, and for Maggie it was a social setting and a hunting ground for a husband. George Holly is concerned with going to the "right" school and choosing the proper fraternity. Gooper attended law school to please his parents, and, although he has been trained, there is no reason to believe that he has been educated. The touring teachers from the Baptist college in Iguana are repressed sexually and socially. Miss Fellowes is presented as a lesbian who is jealous of Shannon's relationship with her student. Further, the teachers as a group lack any curiosity about the culture of the country in which they are traveling.
Their resistance to new experiences is indicative of closed minds. Blanche's education seems to be the only one of serious value, but it was characteristic of the old traditions; in the end, it is useless to her.

Business is one of the most stifling aspects of society, in Williams' view. Laura is incapable of being a productive element in society because her sensitivity prevents her from such dehumanizing activity. Tom is completely degraded by his job in the shoe factory, and he recognizes that if he is to continue supporting his mother and sister it will be at the cost of his own life. Both Jim in *Menagerie* and Cooper in *Cat* seem to represent the shallow and unthinking businessman who cannot imagine any possible life but one of conformity to the existing business standards. Kilroy's job as patsy points up his individual insignificance—he is merely a cog in the social wheel. Brick's jobs as football player and sports announcer have simply been ways to sustain illusion. When, as an announcer, he gradually became aware that he was merely describing someone else's prowess in games he could no longer play himself, the job became unbearable. Shannon found religion to be a business itself. After he had been locked out of his church, he began his job as a tour guide. It became a long series of humiliations, of being fired from one seedy job after another. The employees at Maxine's hotel were also expected to act as her lovers. Williams' view of the business world is a place where man must barter away his
humanity in order to survive. The ability to produce is the only important factor. Those who cannot produce are doomed.

Government is the ultimate destructive social institution which man has invented for himself. In Suddenly Last Summer Mrs. Venable uses the courts to hold up Sebastian's will and thus bring economic pressure on the Hollys'. National boundaries seem to establish a wall to human communication. Kilroy in Camino Real and the touring school teachers in Iguana are disdainful of any culture but their own. By the same token, the Gypsy's daughter in Camino Real tells Kilroy that her countrymen tolerate the Americans only because of greed for the "yankee dollar." War is government's most destructive function. The advent of World War II is the background of The Glass Menagerie and the political upheaval is reflected in the rather pathetic efforts of the people to find escape in dance halls and movie houses. Iguana pictures a German munitions maker delighted in the destructive skill of his country, thrilled with the barrage of super bombs being dropped on England. Williams' most complete view of government is presented in Camino Real. Gutman, as a government official, is dedicated to protecting the privileges of the wealthy, even at the expense of killing a man, which in the restricted world of Camino Real, may be equated with war. Government is represented as the pervasive repressive element in society. It controls the press, provides diversions for the people when they become restless, seduces the populace
with security and luxury, forbids words such as "brother" to be used except at conference tables, where government can contain the reactions. Governments develop such awesome things as the atomic bomb, but they are frightened of dreamers or people of compassion. The wild and free spirit cannot be tolerated, for it is apt to upset the status quo. The governments of the world have demanded man's freedom in return for protecting him. Williams suggests that the price is too high in the twentieth century. Frightened though he may be, man must establish his freedom and his dignity, his compassion and his brotherhood with his fellows. Like Kilroy, all men must finally come to the realization that their hearts are their own, and cannot belong to any government.

If war is one of the symptoms of man's destructive society, poverty is another. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda is so fearful of the future for her already impoverished family, that she alienates her son and places her delicate daughter in potentially destructive situations. In *Camino Real* the poor are completely stripped of dignity, even deprived of life, in order to maintain the privileges of the rich. Maggie's evident greed in *Cat* is motivated by her experiences as a poor relation during childhood. Mrs. Venable is the sole support of the Holly family; because of their greed, she is able to demand their cooperation in her plan to silence Catharine. Mrs. Venable's name is particularly fitting, since, in our society it is wealth, and its attendant power, that is
considered worthy of veneration. Both Hannah and Shannon must rely on Maxine's mercy in Iguana because neither of them can pay for their continued existence. Blanche is completely dependent upon Stella and Stanley for support. On the individual level, Williams' lesson is clear: those who cannot produce will not survive. Those who are rich can engender such greed in the poor that the latter are willing to cooperate in their own destruction. No matter how degrading the poverty of individuals may be, the picture Williams presents of world poverty is even more degrading. Big Daddy is horrified when a four year old native girl is encouraged to make sexual advances to him while he is on a world tour. Sebastian tells Catharine that the poor are the "social disease" of a country, but he preys upon the same beggar children whom he scorns. Their hunger enables him to induce them to cooperate in the fulfillment of his sexual desires. Shannon describes poverty by telling Hannah about "a pair of very old natives of this nameless country, practically naked except for a few filthy rags, creeping and crawling about this mound of . . . and . . . occasionally stopping to pick something out of it, and pop it into their mouths."7 With such a description, Williams makes it evident that, in his view, man's society has failed him.

7Ibid., p. 121.
Man's social institutions, which were first established to protect the weak and to adjust the variance between man's needs for survival and his ability to produce, are failures in the twentieth century. If anything they are operating as a destructive force enabling the wealthy to prey upon the poor, restricting the individual through governmental and business controls, defrauding man of his faith and his compassion. Rather than protecting him, society introduces him to new horrors like the atomic bomb and the loss of religious faith. The absolute standards of the old tradition have been completely overpowered by the industrial society's naturalistic relativity. The rich, the powerful, and the productive will survive and be rewarded. Moral values are of little or no consequence in determining individual worth in such a society.

For Williams, the problems of society are rooted in the moral problems of the individuals within the society. As one man's relationship with another becomes more cannibalistic, motivated by greed, and devoid of meaningful communication, all social relationships reflect this individual situation. The traditional values have been destroyed by a grasping and destructive society which is a reflection of the individual moral state of each man. In Suddenly Last Summer, Williams pictures man, stripped of his religious faith and of the traditional values, facing an antagonistic universe. His society has failed him by declaring nothing
to be sacred but money. In this play, more strongly than in any other, Williams tells us that man is in danger of extinction. It is just possible that like Sebastian man may be devoured as the result of his own immorality. It is also possible that he will simply by overpowered by the implacable naturalistic universe. Without the defense of civilized society, he will be as helpless as Catharine Holly.

Williams' solutions to mankind's crisis are limited. One of his choices is the establishment of communication between human beings through sexual fulfillment. Stanley and Stella are thus saved, and Williams leads us to believe that Maggie may be able to save Brick in the same way. The individual's second choice is to completely withdraw from the corrupt society. This is the ultimate solution in Camino Real, and in the form of insanity, it is also the solution for Blanche and Laura. The final solution is offered in Iguana. Hannah has found the personal answer for man's need to believe in something: he must believe in himself and in his fellow men. For Hannah, the ultimate virtues are endurance, that is, the courage to continue living, and communication, the "broken gates between people so they can reach each other, even if it's just for one night only."\(^8\) Hannah's willingness to accept all forms of love, even the perverted, enables her to transcend the repressing Puritanism...

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 104.
of her past without forcing her to abandon the positive values of the old traditions. This, in turn, leads her to accept the world in its less than perfect state. Through the character of Hannah, Williams suggests that it may still be possible to improve our world, and that as long as such a possibility exists, life is preferable to death. If Shannon's decision to remain with Maxine rather than take the suicidal "long swim" seems a rather weak affirmation of life and hope, it is, nevertheless, a positive move.

Something is definitely wrong with the social order in which the majority of Williams' characters find themselves trapped. So basically corrupt is it that, cancer like, it begins to evolve from a mere social infection into a cosmic disease. This pessimistic picture is relieved only briefly by optimistic flashes of hope for a cure through human integrity, endurance and love. Undeniably, Williams' focus is on the inner life of his characters, of their potential nobility; but to the extent that his characters find their society inimical to the preservation of their integrity, to the extent that personal salvation and social acceptance are directly in opposition, to this extent, Tennessee Williams is a conscious social critic and a serious one.
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