ARROWY SKELETONS:
ANIMAL IMAGERY IN SELECTED WORKS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by
Patricia A. Wilkes
May, 1975

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ABSTRACT

Tennessee Williams's primary tool in creating his art is the image. He uses the image to give his work form, to add layers of meanings to the surface stories, and to achieve organic unity and dynamic color for his plays. The frequency of animal imagery throughout his works suggests that they are central and thematic to his world view. He selects animal images which convey ambivalent, opposing ideas to define the nature of the universe; the ambiguity of the animal images suggests that Williams himself holds ambiguous opinions about certain values. The animal images also convey the major themes which Williams constantly reiterates: loneliness, incompletion, illusion, escape, time, sex, and death. The playwright's use of animal images to symbolize these ideas indicates that such images are essential in explaining his work. Williams has, in fact, created his own personal language of symbolism through animal images; he has taken many of the images that have been symbolic through the body of literature and added to their traditional meanings with his original, sometimes ironic and usually consistent, use of them. This thesis traces Williams's use of animal imagery through most of his published work through 1973 to show the origins of certain images and to analyze their meanings.

CONTENTS

I. IMAGERY AND WILLIAMS'S PERCEPTION

In one of Tennessee Williams's short stories, "The Poet," the poet draws the young to him by his vision, which Williams describes as "a single vast ray of perception."[1] He compels them to understand the rapture of his vision by using gestures of his arms and hands, which are "like the arrowy skeletons of birds."[2] With this apt image Williams suggests the framework of his own writing: the abundant imagery he employs as an arrowy skeleton on which to hang his themes--which, in fact, allows his ideas to soar into the realm of poetry.

The poet uses imagery to suggest many levels of meaning to his readers' imagination. The reader is able to "see" more than one thing, or as Herbert Read has written, several units of observation are synthesized into one commanding image, expressing "a complex idea, not by analysis,

[1]Tennessee Williams, "The Poet," One Arm and Other Stories (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 61.

[2]Ibid., p. 68.

nor by direct statement, but by a sudden perception of an objective relation."[3] This synthesis is essential to the poetic vision of life and to the strategies of combination involved in the making of a poem. "As a poet," Hart Crane wrote, "I may very possibly be more interested in the so-called illogical impingements of words on the consciousness (and their combination and interplay in metaphor on this basis) than I am interested in the preservation of their logically rigid significations at the cost of limiting my subject matter and perceptions involved in the poem."[4] The so-called illogical impingements are not only legitimate instruments of expressive language, they are a part of its very life. Poetic meanings can overreach concrete items in quite different ways from logical, literal meanings. The image is the medium of fuller, riper meaning; not merely a

[3]Herbert Read, English Prose Style (new edition, New York: Pantheon Books, 1952), p. 23. Ezra Pound seems to have meant much the same thing as Read by his "doctrine of the image": "The Image is more than an Idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy."--"An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." See Stanley K. Coffman, Jr., Imagism (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), where a number of such quotations of Pound have been collected.

[4]"A Discussion with Hart Crane," in Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, XXIX (1926), 36. Crane is a favorite poet of Tennessee Williams.

prettification of the already given.[5] According to Caroline Spurgeon in Shakespeare's Imagery, imagery gives a work a "description or an idea, which by comparison or analogy, stated or understood, with something else, transmits to us through the emotions and associations it arouses, something of the 'wholeness,' the depth and richness of the way the writer views, conceives or has felt what he is telling us."[6] Tennessee Williams himself says that he tries hard to give his audiences a knowledge of the things he feels.

> . . .those emotions that stir [a writer] deeply enough to demand expression, and to charge

[5]see Philip Wheelwright, The Burning Fountain (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), pp. 94-98. Wheelwright quotes the Mexican philosopher Jose Vasconcelos, who says that knowledge consists in a unifying act which integrates any given multiplicity into an organic whole that has meaning; however, this synthesis preserves the heterogeneous nature of the world, thereby making dramatic tension, unresolved ambiguity, paradox. Much the same perspectival idea has been expressed by Leonardo da Vinci, although as a painter and engineer he was more inclined to emphasize the literal meaning of perspective as a physical angle of vision. "Every visible object [he writes in Trattato della Pittura] can be seen from an infinite number of places, which places have a continuous quality, divisible in infinitum. Consequently every human action shows itself in an infinite variety of aspects." And he adds that the creative artist's originality consists in taking a fresh stand amid that variety.

[6]Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 9.

> their expression with some measure of light and power, are nearly all rooted, however changed in their surface, in the particular and sometimes peculiar concerns of the artist himself, that special world, the passions and images of it that each of us weaves about him from birth to death, a web of monstrous complexity, spun forth at a speed that is incalculable to a length beyond measure, from the spider mouth of his own singular perceptions.[7]

Williams has indeed spun us a web of images in his published poems, stories, and plays. And, like a spider's web, his images may be perceived to fit into a pattern, as Nancy Patterson contends in her dissertation Patterns of Imagery in the Major Plays of Tennessee Williams. "The image is the center of his conception of drama," she writes; "and he believes his ideas find readier reception under the pleasant disguise of the image."[8] She says that settings and characters, their descriptions, their names, their words and actions, become representative of themes:

> . . .As the visual symbols become verbal images, each play loses something of its specificity and moves toward the timeless quality of the allegory. The settings become reflections of spiritual conditions, the characters become

[7]Tennessee Williams, "Person--to--Person," preface to Cat on a Hot Tin Roof in The Theatre of Tennessee Williams, vol. III (New York: New Directions, 1971), p. 3.

[8]Nancy Patterson, Patterns of Imagery in the Major Plays of Tennessee Williams (University of Arkansas, 1956), p. 1.

> personifications, and the stories become images of the universal pilgrimage through life.[9]

She finds basically two themes: those of Realism, which includes images of the body and the animal; and those of Romanticism, which includes images of the soul and the spirit. Critic John Buell suggests that the image of gentleness--rather than violence--dominates Williams's work; in fact, gentleness provokes violence automatically in Williams's brutal-gentle system. He further suggests that Williams's images are basically human and personal--even private--and thereby emotionally understood on a social scale.[10] This dichotomy of violence and gentleness runs through the entirety of Williams's work and is therefore important because of its recurrence. More than that, however, is that Williams has transformed the brutal/gentle theme to symbols which suggest an array of meanings on top of meanings to his audience--making the words mean more

[9] Ibid., p. 7.

[10] John Buell, "The Evil Imagery of Tennessee Williams," Thought, XXXVIII (1963), 182-185.

in intention than in actual existence and expressing ideas with maximum fullness. As Geraldine Page has commented: ". . .the poet in him selects images. . .Even the props are described with such poetic reverberations that if you change them, you rob them."[11] It is these poetic reverberations which are the essence, the reality of his work, enabling it to achieve greatness. Patterson calls imagery the "single outstanding feature of his creative power."[12] She adds that

> . . .he in fact sees life with the transforming vision that reduces all of existence to symbolism. The image is the very core of his genius. For by his adept use of this tool, he attains organic unity for his plays, he transmits color to an otherwise colorless world, he gives an additional dimension of emotion to the words, and thus he achieves a second level of meaning in plays that are already entertaining for their surface stories. In short, Tennessee Williams, in bringing emotional and intellectual enrichment to his dramas, endows them with the lasting value of poetry.[13]

Williams has expressed his ideas with their maximum fullness by his use of the image; a study of these images can point

[11]in Mike Steen, A Look at Tennessee Williams (New York: Hawthorn Books Inc., 1969), p. 242.

[12]Patterson, p. 363.

[13]Nancy Patterson, Dissertation Abstracts, vol. 17, p. 2014.

the way--"like the arrowy skeletons"--to a greater understanding of his work. He has most frequently used images of animals, not only in his titles, but also in descriptions of characters, in important dialogues, in settings, in stage directions, and in props. This thesis will trace his use of animal imagery as it appears in his collected poetry, collected short stories,[14] novel, all short plays, and all full-length plays through 1973. The paper will attempt to discern patterns in the images and to trace origins of certain major images. Specific images will be discussed, and their relationship to themes will be determined.

[14]Two stories not included in collections have also been discussed.

II. ANIMAL IMAGES IN WILLIAMS'S POETRY

Usually Williams's poems are skipped over by the critics or are mentioned only in terms of understanding his plays. It is true that the concentrated imagery in his poems is a basis for interpreting much of the playwright's language in his dramas, for the plays contain many of the same images and ideas as the poems. However, since his poetic use of images is under discussion in this thesis, the creative patterns of the poems may be dealt with alone and not merely in conjunction with his other work.

Animal images in Williams's poems seem to concentrate in four groups: fish; insects; birds, which are the most frequently used animal images; and beasts, including goats, foxes, cats, apes, bulls, and horses. These animals have held symbolic meaning for man since pre-history; as Jack Randolph Conrad notes, "Historically and presently he has reacted to these creatures symbolically--on a subjective basis."[1]

[1]Jack Randolph Conrad, The Horn and the Sword: The History of the Bull as Symbol of Power and Fertility (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1957), p. 9.

The fish, as the bird of the nether regions, has some phallic meaning, and is frequently noted for its fecundity; for this reason it became a symbol of sacrifice.[2] From this idea came the identification of a saviour with a fish, which was common in ancient theosophies; many words for fish in several different languages refer to deity, Divine Intelligence, or wisdom.[3] According to Swedenborg, fish were the symbols of knowledge, presumably because they were able to explore the uttermost depth of the sea. A salmon, when caught and eaten, would communicate wisdom, prowess, and good fortune to the eater; according to an Irish legend it was called the Salmon of Knowledge, and the word salmon was associated with Solomon, the wise king.[4] Perhaps it is from this tradition that psychologists have viewed the fish as a symbol of the psychic being or the unconscious; or, as Cirlot has stated, the mystic ship of

[2]J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans from Spanish by Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1962), pp. 101-102.

[3]Harold Bayley, The Lost Language of Symbolism (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1912), ii, 82-88.

[4]Ibid., pp. 83-84.

of life.[5] It is with these traditions in mind, perhaps unconsciously, that Williams uses the fish image in his poetry; however, he frequently inverts the symbol, using it ironically, to suggest death rather than the ship of life, mindlessness rather than wisdom. In the poems the fish image is that of some captured, helpless creature, still struggling even though it is defeated. Knowing Williams's concern with the artist and the creation of his art, the initiated reader may surmise that most of his fish images are indeed dealing, at least in part, with the unconscious mind and its struggle to make itself known to the consciousness. For example, in "The Summer Belvedere" Williams writes, "draw back those struggling fish from their breathless pool."[6] The struggle may also be man's struggle to reach out of his aloneness to another person. His contact with others, through sexual union or some other form of communication, is very brief, lasting only for an instant, "the flush that, for one pulse beat, / lets the land /

[5]Cirlot, pp. 101-102.

[6]Tennessee Williams, In the Winter of Cities (New York: New Directions, 1956), p. 48. All poems cited in this chapter are from this volume.

leap fishlike from the struggling / net of dark!" ("Pulse," ll. 24-27, p. 30). The phallic meaning of fish seems implicit here. The defeat of loneliness seems to be the human condition in the Williams canon, but in "Those Who Ignore the Appropriate Time of Their Going" he says that those who continue with the struggle against loneliness "are the most valiant explorers, / twisting crabwise on their bellies under crisscross barbed wire frontiers." (part II, l. 3, p. 38). In the same poem Williams also uses the fish as the traditional symbol of Christianity, but the fish of religion is dead to those valiant explorers of the poem: "the chalk-drawn sign of the fish, jaws agape on huge tongueless outcry / of suffocation / burns over their white iron beds. . ." (part I, ll. 5-9, p. 37). Like a fish out of water, religion has lost its place in the world and is dying.

The idea of death continues to appear with Williams's use of the insect image. He writes that old ladies' skulls are filmy "as dead flies dissolving in water" ("Shadow Boxes," l. 5, p. 57). It is significant that the flies are associated with the women's skulls, because insects have been

recognized as symbols of personality fragmentation by the noted psychologist Carl Gustav Jung.[7] Williams's use of the word "dissolving" here would bear this idea out. Central to the symbolic significance of flies is their connection with pestilence and putrefaction. A well-known example of their psychological meaning of decay is William Golding's novel Lord of the Flies. E. L. Epstein, in his "Notes on Lord of the Flies," points out that the epithet itself ". . .is a translation of the Hebrew Ba'alzevuv," our Beelzebub: ". . .his name suggests that he is devoted to decay, destruction, demoralization, hysteria and panic. . ."[8] The symbol of decay and death occurs more ambiguously with Williams's use of the spider. Although it spins its web to capture and destroy the free flying insects, it also creates its beautiful web. Cirlot notes that the constant weaving and killing, building and destroying are the alternation of forces on which the stability of the universe

[7]Rupert C. Allen, The Symbolic World of Federico Garcia Lorca (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico, 1972), p. 128, quoting Jung.

[8]William Golding, Lord of the Flies (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959), p. 190.

depends.[9] In "Tuesday's Child" Williams contrasts the stability and patience of the spider with the freedom of brother Jack; yet the spider's aggressive nature lurks in the background:

> My brother Jack is wild.
> He watches leaping things and things that fly
> and distances that hounds or falcons cover.
> But I have watched a spider in the sky
> that spins gray lack as patiently as I
> wait for my brother. . .
> (11. 21-26, p. 109)

It seems as if the speaker will bind his brother Jack to him in some way and thus confine, and perhaps destroy, him. The web of the spider may represent the web of illusion which will trap Jack.

In "The Christus of Guadalajara" religion is again pictured as decaying from disuse, for "The bottles of Lachryma Christi / are stored on the spidery shelves" (part II, 11. 9-10, p. 88). The word "spidery" suggests the fragile conditions under which religion is stored, or perhaps the fragility of religion itself, having been put away. In the same poem Christ is presented as pale, fragile, and delicate, as a moth. The Mother of God arranges the

[9]Cirlot, p. 231.

"mothlike" garments of the Christ, his fragility soon to be broken. The moth image appears frequently in Williams's work to suggest the fragile in a world of "mammoth figures," as in "Lament for the Moths":

> A plague has stricken the moths, the moths are dying,
> their bodies are flakes of bronze on the carpets lying.
> Enemies of the delicate everywhere
> have breathed a pestilent mist into the air.
>
> Lament for the velvety moths, for the moths were lovely.
> Often their tender thoughts, for they thought of me,
> eased the neurotic ills that haunt the day.
> Now an invisible evil takes them away.
>
> I move through the shadowy rooms, I cannot be still,
> I must find where the treacherous killer is concealed.
> Feverishly I search and still they fall
> as fragile as ashes broken against a wall.
>
> Now that the plague has taken the moths away,
> who will be cooler than curtains against the day,
> who will come early and softly to ease my lot
> as I move through the shadowy rooms with a troubled heart?
>
> Give them, O mother of moths and mother of men,
> strength to enter the heavy world again,
> for delicate were the moths and badly wanted
> here in a world by mammoth figures haunted!
> (p. 31)

Words such as "flakes," "delicate," "velvety," "shadowy," "fragile," "ashes," and "cooler," indicate the frailty of these creatures and the speaker's desire to be protected

from the harsh light and heat which is destroying them like ashes. Implicit is the moths' attraction to light, which is also the source of their destruction. Cirlot suggests that moths and butterflies have represented the soul and the purification of the soul by fire in traditional symbology.[10] Williams's moth-souls, such as Blanche DuBois, have the seed of their own destruction within themselves, in their desire for the light. Perhaps in another world these moths could survive, but not in this "heavy world," a gargantuan industrial age which has destroyed "the delicate everywhere." The former world, Williams suggests, was one of shadows, coolness, and softness; this was a more romantic time which has now passed "now that the plague" has come. The romance of this earlier time veiled with cool curtains the harsh reality of daylight (lines 7 and 14). Similar to the moth is the butterfly, but Williams usually gives his butterfly images some sexual connotations, as in "The Legend": "Her limbs divided, / spread indolently fanwise, / the wings of a tired butterfly. . ." (part II, ll. 5-7, p. 78).

Sexual symbolism continues in that poem through the

[10] _Ibid._, pp. 33-34.

bird image, a frequent image of sexuality and sexual freedom in the work of Williams. Cirlot writes that, according to Loeffler, the bird, like the fish, was originally a phallic symbol, endowed however with the power of heightening, suggesting sublimation and spiritualization.[11] In addition, the bird may represent thoughts or flights of fancy, and is a symbol of the soul in folklore all over the world.[12] The bird as a symbol of thought appears in "The Dangerous Painters" (ll. 33-37, p. 65), when birds and serpents are "freed, unleashed by the dream's explosion" as they vivisect the flame. In most of Williams's poetry, however, the bird images are clearly sexual, such as "canaries in bedsprings" (l. 14) and "the doves of Aphrodite's or anyone's car!" (l. 18) in "The Jockeys at Hialeah" (p. 72). In "The Angels of Fructification" (pp. 32-34)--the title reeks of sexual implications--the mechanical, sex-machine angels descend to earth, and Azure makes her entrance: "The birds from her vast / umbilicus were released, the torrents of swallows, / the May birds yellow as butter--." Williams is no doubt aware of birds as symbols for angels; here he has inverted the usual meaning of both terms, making the angels malevolent.

[11] _Ibid_., p. 26.

[12] _Ibid_., p. 25.

These angels are seeking the company of men, so it is appropriate that Williams use swallows, for, as Cirlot tells us, the swallow enjoys the company of men.[13] Cirlot also notes that flocks of birds take on evil implications because multiplicity is always a sign of the negative;[14] thus "torrents of swallows." The image of a flock of birds suggests a heightened sexual experience in "Testa Dell' Effebo": "A cloud of birds awoke in him / when Virgo murmured half awake, / Then higher lifted birds and clouds / to break in fire as glasses break" (ll. 9-12, p. 15). The image of the "free lark" suggests freedom from society's sexual restraints in "Pulse," in which a homosexual experience is described. The speaker would sing the free song of the lark, which his "rooted tongue" copies. In "Everyman" (p. 53) Williams employs the bird image to join the ideas of sexual experience and soul, or perhaps even thought and imagination. The woman of Everyman says that his home is air:

[13] Ibid., p. 27.

[14] Ibid., p. 26.

He lay upon me as a bird,
she said with half disdain.
Why, in the hurry of his wings,
he scarcely spoke my name! . . .

Then all at once her body broke
in two parts, like a stone,
and as the savage bird escaped,
It's Everyman, she moaned.

In a lighter tone is "The Jockeys at Hialeah," in which Williams uses everyday speech patterns to achieve his effect. Sexual experience is again described here: "Any how now we stopped at a hoptoad's heaven, / one scrub pine and clean sheets without any questions, / radios numbered as blackbirds in the king's pie!" (Part III, ll. 1-3, p. 71). The same kind of room, "public as a place where strangers come to stay the night" (ll. 1-2, p. 113), is described in "The Last Wine," but Williams's main point here is not the sexual encounter which occurs but rather the passage of time: those "who take repeated shocks / without too visible dismay / can watch the gilded weathercocks / peck the starry corn away" (ll. 11-12). The cock image as Williams uses it, however, generally has a sexual connotation, as in these lines from "The Island Is Memorable to Us":

. . .the black
rope-straining goat's golden-

eyed gaze at our passings,
the leghorn rooster, white

as a bare body's twisting, . . .
(11. 15-18 , p. 107)

The savage bird, or bird of prey, is another way Williams uses the bird image, although less frequently in the poems than in his other works. For example, he mentions the "hawk-bone print of heaven" (part IV, 1. 5, p. 14) in "In Jack-o'-Lantern's Weather," and "the moon is a falcon, hooded" in "Old Men with Sticks" (1. 19, p. 26). More frequently the idea of comfort is employed through the bird image, as in "Mothers' sorrow / often must be thorned / by soft bird language" ("In Jack-o'-Lantern's Weather," part II, 11. 20-21, p. 12). In "Those Who Ignore the Appropriate Time of Their Going" the sister of Rimbaud comforts the unsleeping with a warm teacup of poppyseed brew "like a white bird, snow-blinded" (11. 21-23, p. 37). The nurse's white uniform may be the basis for Williams's association of a white bird with a nurse or one who comforts; for example, the attendant of the mad person in "The Beanstalk Country" is described as "a snowy gull that dips above a wreck" (1. 8, p. 25). The idea of comfort again appears in "The Summer Belvedere" when the speaker asks his kindest friend to

"Brush my forehead with a feather, / not with an eagle's feather, nor with a sparrow's / but with the shadowy feather of an owl" (part II, ll. 4-6, p. 46). He may be asking his friend to comfort him in death, for Cirlot writes that the opposite of the eagle, which represents light, air, and fire, is the owl, which represents darkness, cold, passivity, and death.[15] Williams's remembrance of his grandmother is a comfort, too, but the idea of death also appears in "Recuerdo," part 1, "The Bloodless Violets," (p. 74), where he says that "she who would not / give injury to birds, / had nevertheless been called upon to carry / a cage full of swallows into an evil guest chamber. . ." (ll. 8-11). Perhaps the birds suggest youth here, and the evil chamber suggests the destruction of time, or even the coffin. Cirlot notes that swallows represent the nature of time,[16] and this may be Williams's intent here. Youth is represented by birds elsewhere in the poems, in "The Eyes" (p. 17) where "youth is their uneasy bird" and in "In Jack-o'-Lantern's Weather," in which marvelous children are young and free, tracing new

[15] Ibid., p. 87.

[16] Ibid., p. 306.

designs in the ice, "green and boned as swallows." Time and the loss it brings is also the subject of "The Death Embrace." As the men in blue exterminate themselves, they scatter before the deadly white vapor "with cries like birds'" (part II, l. 14, p. 85). In these poems the bird is the startled victim of the world's violence. The startled halt of common routine by a violent event is also evident in "The Christus of Guadalajara," when "Swallows in circles bewildered / whirl from the dark iron bells" (part II, ll. 1-2, p. 88).

Occurring often in Williams's poetry are animal images symbolic of the sensual. Much of the poetry attacks modern industrial civilization and recommends as an alternative a world of vibrant animality. Thus the goat image appears to suggest sex, as in the earlier passage quoted from "The Island Is Memorable to Us" and in these lines from "The Legend": "already those flames, tinder-quick / the sperm of the goatlike summer / that ravaged her loins. . ." (Part I, ll. 20-22, p. 77). The close association here between goat and the flames is significant. Bayley writes that ". . .the Goat typified Generative Heat or the Vital Urge. The word <u>urge</u> will be recognised. . .to mean the Ever-Existent

Fire, the Solar en-urgy."[17] In the same way the fox appears frequently as a male sex symbol in Williams's work. The playwright clearly borrowed the symbol of the fox from D. H. Lawrence, whom he acknowledges as an important influence. Norman J. Fedder writes that Williams's fox symbol is derivative of Lawrence, from his short story of that name.[18] The fox is used as a metaphor in "Pulse," where the two homosexuals are foxlike men, hunted men (p. 29), and is the subject of "Cried the Fox," which is dedicated "For D. H. L." Moreover, much fox symbolism occurs in Williams's play about Lawrence, "I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix." In "Cried the Fox" the fox is seen as a lone, fugitive animal, constantly pursued, yet courageous in its desperation:

> I run, cried the fox, in circles
> narrower, narrower still,
> across the desperate hollow,
> skirting the frantic hill
>
> and shall till my brush hangs burning
> flame at the hunter's door
> continue this fatal returning
> to places that failed me before!

[17]Bayley, i, 347.

[18]Norman J. Fedder, The Influence of D. H. Lawrence on Tennessee Williams (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966), p. 18.

Then, with his heart breaking nearly,
the lonely, passionate bark
of the fugitive fox rang out clearly
as bells in the frost dark,

Across the desperate hollow,
skirting the frantic hill,
calling the pack to follow
a prey that escaped them still.

The pack, which Fedder interprets as bourgeois civilization,[19] preys upon the fugitive animal who manages to elude it, but not without heartbreak and loneliness. His is the lone voice of truth, of the pariah poet. The fox's tail mentioned in the second stanza relates to an old Slavic tale recounted by Bayley in which a fox serves a horseman who has fled him by running ahead and clearing the road for him with his bushy tail. Bayley adds that to the Egyptians the fox represented the opener of ways, the pathfinder through the wilderness (which would be the function of the poet-prophet to the pack), and that the fox also symbolized wiliness, wisdom, subtlety, and quick-wittedness.[20] Williams's attitude towards his fugitive fox is one of compassion, and in this he differs from his mentor Lawrence, whose fugitive

[19] Ibid., p. 19.

[20] Bayley, ii, 102-105.

foxes are often abhorred as sexual perverts. As Fedder states, "Lawrence is never as compassionate as Williams toward his fragmented people."[21] Like the moths of "Lament for the Moths," whose own desire for the flame contributes to the destruction of their fragile spirituality, it is the fox's own passionate, sensual cry which calls the pack to pursue him. Thus, the seed of his destruction is within himself, his own passion and inability to conform to the multitude.

The frantic desperation which drives the fox-artist is personified as panthers and tigers in "The Dangerous Painters." The painters "feel the tigers running the limitless jungles of their nerves" (11. 90-91, p. 63), and "panthers springing through their nerves" (1. 62, p. 62). Williams warns the reader to

> Inspect their pictures! Panthers are always springing out of the frames, lightning and springing tigers, long cats springing, something is always springing, barely leashed by the limitations of canvas.
> . . . .Tigers! Tigers springing!
>
> (11. 63-66).

The trail of the springing tiger image in modern poetry is long and full of ethical significance. Joseph Warren Beach,

[21]Fedder, p. 19.

in his Obsessive Images, traces the symbol from Blake's use of it in "The Tyger," through Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle," Eliot's "Gerontion," to poems by Auden, Richard Wilbur, Stephen Spender, and Wilfred Owen. Beach points out that

> the springing of the tiger or the lion is associated with moral weakness on the part of the victim, and it is an inner state of mind, a weakness in character that gives rise to the victim's sense of guilt or uncertainty or spiritual error. And so, in later uses of the tiger symbol, it is likely to be associated with some inner corruption.[22]

The feelings of guilt and moral paralysis symbolized by the tiger are frequent themes in the work of Williams. Perhaps the author as well as Professor Beach has noted the frequency with which "something is always springing" from the work of other artists as they concern themselves with the metaphysical problem of evil. Other cats which appear in Williams's poetry are fierce, as in these lines from "The Death Embrace": "The great wheels spat / like cats,

[22]Joseph Warren Beach, Obsessive Images: Symbolism in Poetry of the 1930's and 1940's, edited by William van O'Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960), p. 25. See Beach's chapter "The Secret Terror in the Heart," pp. 19-41, for a full discussion.

with incredible malice" (part I, 11. 16-17, p. 84). Even the purring of kittens is pictured as deceitful in "The Angels of Fructification." As the mechanical angels, who epitomize modern industrial society, make their descent,

> One thing only
> might have incurred suspicion.
> The one in the rear
> was shinier than the others, and while they purred
> like monstrous, innocent kittens,
> she, like a serpent, hissed and dripped blue spittle
> (11. 45-50, p. 33).

The relationship between the cat and the serpent has persisted through mythology, according to M. Oldfield Howey, author of The Cat in the Mysteries of Religion and Magic. He states that the imagery of the cat and the serpent, constantly in combat, is purposefully paradoxical:

> The Cat and the Serpent are merely two forms of the same allegory, both symbolically portraying the truth that God is All. Each alone represents the apparently dual and warring forces of Good and Evil.
>
> Throughout mythology the idea underlying the symbol of the Coiled Cat (or Encircled Serpent) is emphasised and insisted upon. Of good beings, evil entities are born, and of evil good. From the beautiful the hideous comes forth, from the hideous the beautiful.
>
> All natural phenomena confirm, and possibly give rise to the allegory. . . .The cat in repose forms a circle, even as the serpent's head finds and bites its tail again. Thus it is the ideograph

> of Divinity in Nature, the Eternal, the Universal, the Complete.[23]

This element of inversion, and a recognition of the duality of the universe, is a persistent fact in Williams's work; it may be a key to the entire body of his work. Over and over ambivalent images appear to emphasize the ambiguity in Williams's world. Fedder notes that the vitally alive serpent in this passage has more dignity than the modern robot-man with which it is contrasted;[24] thus, even though it drips evil, its passionate sensuality is to be desired over non-feeling. Williams has caught in this passage, too, another connection between the cat and the serpent, for it has often been remarked that the spit of the cat perfectly imitates the hiss of the serpent.[25] Another ominous sound is connected with cats in "The Jockeys at Hialeah," where something suspiciously rattles and hums in the one-night room. Daisy explains that the noise is "a kind of electric

[23]M. Oldfield Howey, The Cat in the Mysteries of Religion and Magic (New York: Castle Books, 1956), pp. 37-38. Emphasis mine P. W. W.

[24]Fedder, p. 17.

[25]Howey, p. 35.

contrivance / for curing inquisitive cats of their bad habits. . ." (part III, 11. 9-10, p. 72).

Williams's images of apes, bulls, and horses are also ambivalent. At times they represent the strong, brute forces of the world; at other times they represent the gentle creatures. In "The Dangerous Painters" the painters themselves begin to appear in the wreckage of the galleries, "naked and ugly as apes at a masquerade party. . ." (part II, 11. 39-40, p. 65). These animals are not only threatening, but also deceitful, disguising their brutishness in the masque. Beryl Rowland notes that the idea of the ape's representing art is not new; several writers have depicted inferior artists as apes.[26] On the other hand, the monkey of "Part of a Hero" is himself threatened--threatened by the cold, which the "hero" tries to keep away by burning fires to warm and purify himself. As he builds his fires, the "hero" hums a mournful, thin song "that comes from a shivering monkey, a monkey / not of the tropics but of the poles. . ." (11. 8-9, p. 54). Some of the horse images in

[26]Beryl Rowland, Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1973), p. 13.

the poetry suggest those who are threatened by the world, the delicate ones, as well. In "Which Is My Little Boy?" the delicate John, "Jean qui rit," has a hobbyhorse which "carries me back to my native ground" (ll. 5-6, p. 95). There is also a fragility about Little Horse of the poem by the same name (p. 116). And in "The Road," about a shoe salesman like Williams's father, the image of the snow-white ass is an allusion to Christ and suggests purity, humility--and death. In two other poems horse images appear in connection with death. Notice the juxtaposition of ice cream and death in these lines from "The Jockeys at Hialeah": ". . .what Mexicans call refrescos y helados, / vended between the deaths of bulls on Sundays. / She dies likewise eight times between sol y sombra / and is hauled by a team of horses across an arena" (part II, ll. 19-22, p. 71). Williams shows the irony of making pageantry out of death; at the same time he is using her eight deaths as a symbol of sexual intercourse "with all the free pussy there is in a land of plenty!" The identical image, that of horses hauling away the dead body of a woman, appears in "Cortege." In this poem the immense aliveness of the horses is contrasted with the woman's deadness: "The funeral

cortege / . . .bore with pomp / a woman dead on Monday. / The rumps and nostrils / of horses steamed and frosted" (part II, 11. 17-26, p. 51).

One of the most tender images in Williams's poetry occurs in "The Interior of the Pocket." Since the poem is about masturbation, the image has sexual connotations; yet it transcends this meaning to represent closeness and contact of all kinds. And it is an image which reappears in the author's work. In lines 23-27 the hot white fingers

> offer again their gesture of reassurance
> to that part of him, crestfallen, on which he depends
> for the dark room he longs to sleep in,
> the way small animals nudge one another at night,
> as though to whisper, <u>We're close</u>! <u>There is still no danger</u>!
>
> (p. 36)

The small animals, threatened by the reality of the dark night, huddle together in fear. They look to each other for courage and help, but all the others are just as helpless and innocent.

The variety of animal images and their meanings in these poems recurs in the rest of Williams's work. The pattern of the images can first be seen in the poems and will continue in the plays. The pattern is a division, as Nancy

Patterson suggests in her dissertation, between those who are brutal, destructive and brimming with life and those who are gentle, fragile, and spiritual by nature.[27] The pattern continues in the short stories.

[27]Patterson, op.cit.

III. ANIMAL IMAGES IN WILLIAMS'S SHORT STORIES

A study of Williams's short stories offers a further basis for understanding his images. Among the stories appear original sketches for long and short plays, including such well-known plays as The Glass Menagerie, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Summer and Smoke, and The Night of the Iguana. Moreover, the changes made in the dramatic presentation of these stories offer further clues to certain repeated images. Even in stories which have not been used as germs for plays there appear many of Williams's frequently used animal images.

The outsider is a recurring personality in the Williams canon. In Williams's introduction to the New Classics Edition of Carson McCullers's Reflections in a Golden Eye, he writes that there are only two kinds of people who live outside this world of ours--the artists and the insane, those "who have enough of one or both magical elements, lunacy and vision, to permit them also to slip sufficiently apart from 'this so-called world of ours' to undertake or accept an exterior view of it."[1] The Williams artist may never paint or put words on

[1]Tennessee Williams, "The Book," Introduction to New Classics Edition of Carson McCullers, Reflections in a Golden Eye (New York: New Directions, 1950), p. ix.

paper, but his temperament, his way of seeing the world, make him an artist nevertheless. It is his special sensibilities which set him apart.[2] All Williams's outsiders seem to have these special sensibilities. All the outsiders--the artist, the lunatic, the cripple, the foreigner, the old, the sexual specialist, even the athlete--have a unique sensitivity to the world at large. All these character types appear in the short stories and all have special imagery, much of it animal, surrounding them.

In Williams's story "The Poet" the animal imagery surrounding the artist suggests freedom. The poet shares a sense of freedom with the children of the story (children are akin to artists in their special perception of the world) and with birds and horses. The children rise "like birds," "rise as swallows"[3] past the mundane labors of their parents to respond to the vision of the poet. The poet himself has hands "like the arrowy skeletons of birds,"[4] which allow him to transmit

[2]When Harold Clurman, in Lies Like Truth, says of Blanche in Streetcar, "She is a poet, even if we are dubious about her understanding of the writers she names," he is describing the artist as Williams uses him. See Clurman, Lies Like Truth: Theatre Reviews and Essays (New York: McMillan, 1958).

[3]Williams, "The Poet," p. 66.

[4]Ibid., p. 68.

his special vision to the children. It is significant that Williams uses the same phrase, "arrowy skeletons of birds," to refer to the supreme dreamer/romantic, Don Quixote, in The Knightly Quest. As the poet tells the children his story, "a huge blue rocking-horse seemed to be loose among them whose plumes were smoky blue ones the sky could not hold and so let grandly go of."[5] The idea of children and their abandon in play is implicit in the rocking-horse image. The horse's plumes suggest an almost cavalier attitude, and are a reminder of Williams's use of the plume in Alma's hat in Summer and Smoke. This huge rocking-horse demands so much freedom that not even the sky can hold it. This is an image which recurs in the playwright's work. All the images in this story suggest a fragility--indeed, the poet himself is in such fragile health that his vision destroys him. Yet the vision itself is inexhaustible, for "the young were drawn to him with a mysterious yearning and hung on his syllables as bees cluster on the inexhaustible chalice of a flower."[6] This image suggests that the children will use and modify the sweetness of the poet's

[5]Ibid., p. 67.

[6]Ibid., p. 64.

vision to produce their own natural sweetness.

The separateness of the writer is detailed in the story "The Night of the Iguana," a sketch which preceded the play of the same name. Edith Jelkes attempts to be an artist and thinks she has the soul of an artist. She is alone. She thinks she sees in a young writer staying at the same secluded hotel a kindred spirit, and she feels an urge to share something with him. As she looks at him she sees

> something a little monkey-like in his face as there frequently is in the faces of serious young writers, a look that reminded Miss Jelkes of a small chimpanzee she had once seen in the corner of his cage at a zoo, just sitting there staring between the bars, while all his fellows were hopping and spinning about on their noisy iron trapeze. She remembered how she had been touched by his solitary position and lacklustre eyes. She had wanted to give him some peanuts but the elephants had devoured all she had. She had returned to the vendor to buy some more but when she brought them to the chimpanzee's cage, he had evidently succumbed to the general impulse, for now every man Jack of them was hopping and spinning about on the clanking trapeze and not a one of them seemed a bit different from the others.[7]

In reality it is she, and not the writer, who is solitary; for while he seems at times to share her aloneness, he always

[7]Williams, "The Night of the Iguana," <u>One Arm</u>, pp. 176-77.

returns to the company of his younger writer friend.[8] Hannah's plight as a lone, suffering human being is emphasized by the figure of the captured iguana with which she identifies.[9] What bothers her most is the inhumanity of its treatment while it is captive. "I have an aversion to brutality," she says, and adds that we like to think that

> we're the only ones capable of suffering, but that is just human conceit. We are not the only ones that are capable of suffering. . . .And there is so much suffering in the world, so much that is necessary suffering, such as illnesses and accidents which cannot be avoided. But there is so much

[8]The figure of the writer is ambiguous. He shares with Miss Jelkes and some of Williams's other artists some sense of compassion (he says he is attracted by helpless people) and a differentness (he takes barbiturates, he is ill, he is a writer, he engages in homosexuality), yet he drifts back into "this socalled world of ours" to engage in cruelty, such as remarks at Miss Jelkes's expense and his attempted rape of her. (Despite Banjamin Nelson's attempts to put all the blame of their abortive union on Miss Jelkes, the writer's assault on her is nevertheless attempted rape and is cruelty.) Nelson states that the writer's frustration and guilt in his homosexual relationship lead him to attempt a communication with Miss Jelkes, but a close reading of the story does not bear this out. For Nelson's discussion of Miss Jelkes's destructive nature see Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work (New York: Ivan Obolensky, Inc., 1961), pp. 186-188. See also Josephine Broger, "Gothicism in Selected Prose and Dramatic Works of Tennessee Williams," master's thesis (Houston: University of Houston, 1970), pp. 24-27.

[9]Nelson suggests that the iguana is also a phallic symbol which brings together the needs of Miss Jelkes, whose "demon of virginity" is at odds with her intense desire, and of the writer, who feels guilt and frustration.

> unnecessary suffering, too, so much that is inflicted simply because some people have a callous disregard for the feelings of others.[10]

Unlike the free poet of the earlier story, who is compared to birds and horses, Miss Jelkes is the imprisoned artist, imprisoned by fears and inhibitions and loneliness just as the iguana is tied by its little rope, "continually and hopelessly clawing at the dry earth within the orbit of the rope-length, while naked children squatted around it, poking it with sticks in the eyes and mouth."[11] She, too, has suffered the cruelties of the world. (The fact that we may consider her ailments trivial does not lessen the suffering she feels.) Annihilating spells of neurasthenia had caused her to break down and led her to the verge of lunacy; neuroses now cause her entire being to turn into "a feverish little machine for the production of fears."[12] Like the iguana, she is imprisoned by her own inability to communicate her fears:

> She wished that she were a writer. If she were a writer it would be possible to say things that only

[10]Williams, "The Night of the Iguana," pp. 181-183.

[11]*Ibid.*, p. 179.

[12]*Ibid.*, p. 188.

> Picasso had ever put into paint. But if she said them, would anybody believe them? Was her sense of the enormous grotesquerie of the world communicable to any other person?[13]

Williams makes her parallel to and identification with the iguana obvious, especially at the end of the story when she discovers that the animal is loose:

> How gratefully it must be breathing now! And she was grateful, too, for in some equally mysterious way the strangling rope of her loneliness had also been severed by what had happened tonight on this barren rock above the moaning waters.[14]

She feels that her encounter with the writer has enabled her to communicate, to be less lonely and to shed her fears; in reality, however, that communication, like the rock above the waters, is barren and leads to no real change in her. Her encounter with the writer is punctuated with the image of a free yet fierce and furious white bird. The image serves to describe a storm which occurs outside the cabana as well as the fury of the writer's attempted sexual assault on her. The storm plunges toward them "like a giant bird lunging up and down on its terrestrial quarry, a bird with immense white

[13] _Ibid._, p. 188.

[14] _Ibid._, p. 196.

wings and beak of godlike fury. . . .But the giant white bird did not know where it was striking. Its beak of fury was blind, or perhaps the beak--"[15] In the same way the writer thrusts at her "like a bird of white blind fury. . . .She cried out with pain as the predatory fingers dug into her flesh."[16] But she survives the assault as the Costa Verde survives its assault, and she is grateful for the peace following the storm.[17]

The artist figure again appears in "The Angel in the Alcove" in the characters of the writer-narrator and the tubercular artist. However, there are no images of freedom or vision in this sketch; filth and disease[18] are pictured

[15] Ibid., pp. 193-4.

[16] Ibid., p. 194.

[17] Whether the writer survives is left unstated. Benjamin Nelson suggests that he needed sex with her to prove himself a man and may be destroyed by her abrupt withdrawal from him. However, he still has the younger writer to turn to. His attempted assault on her is clearly an attempt at communication, however brief and pathetic; yet in its fury and its results to him it is probably also a destructive act. Hence the phallic bird is an image of devouring destruction as well as of freedom.

[18] Signi Falk points out that a frequently expressed theory of Williams is that art is a by-product of disease. See Tennessee Williams (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1961), p. 34.

here. The quick-sketch artist lives in a rooming-house run by a suspicious landlady in the old French Quarter of New Orleans. His world is completely hostile. The people living in the boarding house are mostly hungry; Mrs. Wayne, one of the tenants, tells salacious stories to get food, scraping the saucepans clean "with wolfish relish."[19] The diseased artist invents all sorts of trivial complaints to hide from himself the knowledge that he is dying. One of these subterfuges, writes Williams, is a nightly preoccupation with bed-bugs. He reports angrily to the landlady on the number that have bitten him during the night. Instead of treating him with compassion, the landlady reviles him because of his illness; she says he, not the bugs, put blood on his pillow. "Huh! Bugs! You're the bugs that puts blood all over this linen! It's you, not bugs, that makes such a filthy mess at the Court of Two Parrots it's got to be scoured with lye when you leave every night! . . ."[20] The bed-bugs represent the hostility and nastiness of the world he lives in; even the casual mention of the Court of Two Parrots may represent the

[19]Williams, "The Angel in the Alcove," One Arm, p. 141.

[20]Ibid., p. 147.

confinement and lack of freedom in his life, since parrots are caged birds who cannot speak for themselves but merely mimic what is said to them. Fedder notes that Williams's hatred of the bourgeoisie is directly expressed in the ugly figure of the landlady who harries the artist to his destruction.[21] She turns the bed-bugs, ugliness of her own making, as it were, into something which is the artist's fault. She tells him that he spits up blood all the time, leaving a trail, "a bloody track like a chicken that runs with its head off."[22] Like the chicken, the artist is dead already, merely going through the motions of life.

Another landlady is the widow Isabel Holly in "The Coming of Something to the Widow Holly." Although she is not as fierce as the landlady of the previous story, she runs the same kind of rooming house in New Orleans. The animal images again support the picture of squalor and filth. Her tenants are parasites, clinging "as leeches to their damp-smelling rooms."[23] One of the tenants, Florence, receives visits from an old female cousin who brings a paper bag in the vain hope

[21]Fedder, p. 32.

[22]Williams, "The Angel in the Alcove," p. 145.

[23]Tennessee Williams, "The Coming of Something to Widow Holly," Hard Candy (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 166.

that Florence will give her something to take away; once Florence left the corpse of a rat in the held-out paper bag. The image is of decay as well as cruelty. After the Widow Holly's roomers leave, she receives a message from Christopher D. Cosmos delivered by a small white rodent which squeezes under the door and drops the envelope. Beryl Rowland notes that a thirteenth-century legend used a white rat to symbolize the way time gnaws at life, day by day.[24] Perhaps Williams, with his obsession with time, uses his rodent to represent time as well.

In "The Resemblance Between a Violin Case and a Coffin" and "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," both suggestive of Williams's sister Rose and models for The Glass Menagerie, the figure of the artist again appears, as a musician in "Coffin," and as a writer in "Portrait." "The Resemblance Between a Violin Case and a Coffin" tells of his sister's troubled emotional state as she prepares for a music recital with a young man who plays the violin. The untimely death of the young man, Richard Miles, is foreshadowed by the author's mention of Camilla Rucellai, a mystic of Florence who seeing Pico della Mirandola entering the city on a milk-white horse fainted at the sight of his

[24]Rowland, p. 136.

beauty and murmured that he would pass in the time of lilies, meaning that he would die early.[25] This image of loss underscores the theme of loss in the story. Elisabeth Goldsmith writes that the white horse is also associated with innocence and with a savior-god, and reminds us that the pale horse of the Apocalypse is a well-known symbol of death.[26] The white horse may represent his beauty and purity, and perhaps suggests youth and freedom as well. The image of freedom as free birds also appears in this story: "there were occasional periods of revival, when she would attack the piano with an explosion of confidence and the melodies would surge beneath her fingers like birds out of cages."[27] The bird image is used again in "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," but is altered somewhat. Instead of being free, the birds are startled, representing Laura's fears. Her knowledge of the keyboard would "fly from her mind like a bunch of startled birds."[28] The narrator of

[25]Williams, "The Resemblance Between a Violin Case and a Coffin," Hard Candy, p. 94.

[26]Elisabeth Goldsmith, Ancient Pagan Symbols (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1929), p. 124.

[27]Williams, "Violin Case and Coffin," p. 97.

[28]Williams, "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," One Arm, p. 98.

the story is a poet who says he was trying to ride two horses simultaneously in two opposite directions; that is, his work at the warehouse and his attempts at writing poetry conflicted. He is another of the artistic outsiders, at whom his co-workers smile "as people smile at an oddly fashioned dog who crosses their path at some distance."[29] Williams uses the image of a dog again in the story in a detailed description of a dirty white Chow who stalks the alley cats in the area between the two wings of the building where the Wingfields live. He viciously kills young cats right beneath Laura's window. Williams seems to be drawing an analogy between the alley tragedy and delicate Laura's experience with contemporary society; like the kittens, she is a victim of her environment. Laura is later compared to a bird as she enters to meet Jim, who has been led "lamblike" up the steps to call on her. The door opens and she stands there in a ridiculous dress of her mother's and high-heeled slippers "on which she balanced uncertainly like a tipsy crane of melancholy plumage. . .and her delicate wing-like shoulders were hunched with nervousness."[30] The picture is vivid.

[29] Ibid., p. 105.

[30] Ibid., p. 106.

Two stories about college undergraduate experiences also have characters who are aspiring to be writers. Both stories contain sexual themes; in both Williams utilizes animal imagery to symbolize physical passion. In "The Field of Blue Children" a college girl who finds release in writing poems and a shy awkward boy who writes lines of touching imagery and originality become lovers for a while. The stirring of their sexual feelings is underscored by the image of a white feather dropping from a stirring wing of a pigeon onto the girl's hair. The boy lifts it off and thrusts it in his hatband; the girl, still feeling his light touch, wonders if he will keep the feather because it had once touched her. That night, as the girl reads his poems, a rising excitement grows in her, and as she runs to find the boy "there were cicadas burring in the large oaks--she had not heard them until this moment. . . . She listened and there was not a voice anywhere, nothing except the chant of cicadas."[31] The rushing sound of the cicadas emphasizes the sexual awakening experienced by the girl. Rupert C. Allen, in explicating Garcia Lorca's poem Cicada, notes that the cicada is a hidden presence, a symbol of the libido; its steady, shrill, electric sound denotes frenzied energy and

[31]Williams, "The Field of Blue Children," One Arm, pp. 160-161.

intensity.[32] It is probable that Williams, who was influenced by Garcia Lorca, was aware of the Spanish poet's use of the cicada as a symbol of self-renewing, pure energy. "The Important Thing" also describes two college students seeking to find their answers in sex. At a college dance all the young people are tacitly prevented from this by oversolicitous chaperones who "flitted among them with bird-like alacrity."[33] The boy of the story is again a poet, the girl a female intellectual; she searches for fossils, dancing around an abandoned rock quarry "like a bright, attractive little monkey on a wire."[34] The image conveys a sense of meaningless, nervous activity. When the couple attempts sexual union, they are unsuccessful: "They just fought together like two wild animals, rolling in the grass and clawing at each other. Flora clawed at John's face and John clawed at Flora's body. They accepted this thing, this desperate battle between them."[35] The sexual impotence caused by the girl's resistance is an early statement

[32]Allen, pp. 33-44.

[33]Tennessee Williams, "The Important Thing," Three Players of a Summer Game and Other Stories (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 33.

[34]Ibid., p. 42.

[35]Ibid., pp. 44-45.

of the idea of Puritan repression as a deterrent to happy sexual relations, a frequent theme for Williams. The theme of both stories is loneliness and loss; the boys of both stories, both poets, feel the loss most deeply.

Isolation and the quest for a meaningful relationship are themes that continue to run through Williams's stories. In "The Vine," which again deals with the artist-type, this time a broken-down actor, the only hope that remains to the actor is that by remaining together with his wife he can prevent their lives from disintegrating completely. He awakens with a mouthful of old chicken feathers[36] to discover that his wife is gone: "The emptiness of the room replied to him with the desultory drone of a large horsefly; its wings flashed blue against the shining copper screen, as though his wife had been transformed into an insect."[37] The horsefly image appears later in the story also and seems to represent to the actor, Donald, the same thing that the iguana represented to Miss Jelkes; it symbolizes all creatures who are tormented or destroyed by the world and becomes a symbol of Donald himself:

[36]Williams, "The Vine," Hard Candy, p. 182.

[37]Ibid., p. 183.

> The horsefly had also moved to that other window and showed a recession of power. Against the exterior light its delicate wings still glinted as points of blue flame, but the furious dives at the screen were now interspersed with periods of reflection which seemed to admit that failure was not any longer the least imaginable of all eventualities. Donald crossed immediately to the screen and gently unlatched it to let the fly out. . . He was a very kind man. There was something soft and passive about his mind which made it unusually responsive to the problems of creatures smaller or even weaker than himself.[38]

The same compassion had been shown by the actor years earlier, he remembers, when he had put his arms around a little Alabama spinster author as she had begun to cry with the realization that her play was a failure. "What's a turkey?," she had asked, and he had replied, "A bird with feathers!"[39] Other animal images in this story are those of insects. His wife's past gracefulness is remembered by a photograph of her when she was in the Glow Worm Ballet; this reminds him of the vanity and waste of his life, and he attempts to recapture the youth and confidence which he has lost by a flirtation with a young woman at a soda fountain. She rebuffs him and

[38] Ibid., p. 196.

[39] Ibid., p. 197.

begins to speak to him "in a low, rapid voice like the buzz of a swarm of stinging insects."[40] The insects represent the disintegration that is occurring in the actor's life. Jung points out how, psychologically, insects may "represent autonomous. . .units that tend to break away from the psychic hierarchy. . . .these little creatures,. . .if control should fail, would reappear as those well-known insulae, or personality fragments."[41] The buzzing sound of the insects represents the buzzing in his head as he realizes that everything is falling apart. He tries to regain his sense of youth by "dressing away his blues," but his white linen suit is too tight, and he realizes that he only looks ridiculous: "He noticed that the starched jacket now flared behind him in a way that made him look like a bantam rooster strutting along the street in snowy feathers."[42] The image suggests that he has an exaggerated sense of importance, like the bantam rooster, which makes his strutting look silly. (The pajamas he was wearing when he got up that morning are about as ridiculously

[40] Ibid., p. 190.

[41] Carl Gustav Jung, quoted in Allen, p. 128.

[42] Williams, "The Vine," pp. 188-189.

flamboyant--purple with white frogs on them)[43] The ex-actor's world is crumbling in a series of ordinary reversals, and he returns to his room to find that his wife's clothes are gone. As he collapses on the bed, weeping helplessly, his wife returns, and both admit what they have been trying to conceal: they are broken people who have wasted their lives and are stripped of everything but each other.

"Two on a Party" also deals with isolation and loss, but Williams turns to the night people for his protagonists. These characters, however, are still the outsiders and still possess the more sensitive temperament of the artist. Billy, a homosexual ex-writer, and Cora, a prostitute who is slowly dying of drink, join forces out of loneliness and fear. Like the ex-actor of "The Vine," they are vainly trying to stop the corroding rush of time which spells doom. Williams says that their natural enemies were the squares, "all those bull-like middle-aged couples that stood off sharply and glared at you as you swept through a hotel lobby with your blushing trade," and "the one great, terrible, worst of all enemies, which is the fork-tailed, cloven-hoofed, pitchfork-bearing

[43] _Ibid._, p. 184.

devil of Time!"[44] Cora and Billy are pathetically ridiculous characters, and they are described in comic terms. Williams uses the image of a seal, comically performing tricks, to describe Cora. She loses a diamond ear-clip in a hotel bar, and "she kept ducking down like a diving seal to look for it. . .bobbing up and down and grunting and complaining. . ."[45] The seal image is repeated in "The Gnadiges Fraulein," a short play by Williams. She is also said to make "nervous henlike motions of the head and shoulders and torso. . ."[46] Her drinking starts to tell on her appearance: her eyes look "like a couple of poached eggs in a sea of blood."[47] They are ridiculously dressed (like Donald of "The Vine") as they travel through Texas. Cora is wearing a cowboy shirt with a bucking broncho over one large breast and a roped steer over the other. Billy has on a sport shirt that is covered with leaping dolphins.[48] Both costumes appear to suggest their

[44]Williams, "Two on a Party," Hard Candy, p. 62.

[45]Ibid., p. 48.

[46]Ibid., p. 69.

[47]Ibid., p. 55.

[48]Ibid., pp. 65-6.

occupations. The designs on Cora's shirt suggest a gut-level bestial nature, wild animality shown by steers and bronchos. The dolphins suggest freedom, perhaps freedom from society's norm. Cirlot notes that to the pagans they were associated with erotic deities.[49] Their occupations are detailed in a longer sea image:

> The trade was running as thick as spawning salmon up those narrow cataracts in The Rockies. Head to tail, tail to head, crowding, swarming together, seemingly driven along by some immoderate instinct. It was not a question of catching; it was simply a question of deciding which ones to keep and which to throw back in the stream, all glittering, all swift, all flowing one way which was toward you![50]

The image aptly suggests the number of clientele as well as the sexual drive which the trade of prostitution involves. Cora's and Billy's attitudes toward their trade, merely fish to catch to bring them a livelihood, is involved in the image also. As their luck changes and the party is over, the two are described as "two birds flying together against the wind."[51] Williams says that "it's fun to fly away from a threat of danger.

[49]Cirlot, p. 81.

[50]Williams, "Two on a Party," p. 53.

[51]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 78.

(Most dreams are about it, one form or another, in which man remembers the distant mother with wings. . .)"[52] The image of birds who are startled and escaping in flight emphasizes the familiar escape motif found in Williams's work. The image appears, for example, in "Chronicle of a Demise," when the Misses Doyle and La Mantia scramble away from the cot of the saint "like a pair of frightened hens."[53]

Also frightened is the "panicky little man" Lucio of "The Malediction." He finds warmth and security in his relationship with Nitchevo, a stray cat which had belonged to the former tenant of the room he rents.

> She was the first living creature in all of the strange northern city that seemed to answer the asking look in his eyes. She looked back at him with cordial recognition. Almost he could hear the cat pronouncing his name.[54]

He invests in the cat an almost godlike, mysterious knowledge. She represents to him all that is good, all that he would like

[52] Ibid., p. 77.

[53] Williams, "Chronicle of a Demise," One Arm, p. 79.

[54] Williams, "The Malediction," One Arm, p. 34. See chapter two for a detailed summary of the symbology of cats.

to be. He even compares his brother Silva, whom he would like to be more like, to a cat, and finds identity with Nitchevo:

> Nitchevo's presence was a denial of all the threatening elements of chance. You could see that Nitchevo did not take stock in chance. She believed that everything progressed according to a natural, predestined order and that there was nothing to be apprehensive about. All of her movements were slow and without agitation. They were accomplished with a consummate grace. . . .As he watched her his mind smoothed out. The tight knots of anxiety loosened and were absorbed. . . .He began to feel sleepy as he watched the cat--sleepy and entranced. Her form grew in size and the rest of the room dwindled and receded. It seemed to him, then, that they were of equal dimensions. He was a cat like Nitchevo. . .[55]

Like the illusion-filled letters of glory he writes to his brother, his communications with Nitchevo the cat are merely denials of the things that worry him the most; he assures her that there is nothing to be afraid of between heaven and earth.[56] But these denials are still illusions. He builds all his illusions about the safety of the world in Nitchevo. To her the world is full of infinite mercy and she rests in perfect content. "Nitchevo, being a cat, existed in only one sliding

[55] Ibid., pp. 41-42.

[56] Ibid., p. 43.

moment of time: that moment was good."[57] This is the world that Lucio longs for. But he is unable to believe in a God of infinite mercy as the cat does; instead, he has the "Sense of the Awful" which appears in so many Williamsian characters. Signi Falk calls it the "moral paralysis" of Williams's heroes;[58] here, Lucio projects his own weakness onto God:

> God was, like Lucio, a lonely and bewildered man Who felt that something was wrong but could not correct it, a man Who sensed the blundering sleep-walk of time and hostilities of chance and wanted to hide Himself from them in places of brilliance and warmth.[59]

He is unable to escape those two enemies, time and chance. At the first of this story the world had been presented not so much as the enemies time and chance but in the image of the ox, neutral and submissive, capable of being used for good: "the earth is quiet and docile and mindless again, a dull-witted ox that moves in a circular furrow, to plow up sections

[57] Ibid., p. 48.

[58] Signi Lenea Falk, Tennessee Williams (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 44.

[59] Williams, "The Malediction," One Arm, p. 48.

of time for man's convenience."[60] But his illusions about the world are stripped away by a coldly industrialized world where the machines "cried out in a loud and furious voice, which ended abruptly the man's illusion as master."[61] Every illusion is destroyed until Lucio's only escape is suicide. The death of his brother, the loss of his job and room, and the illness of the cat contribute to his defeat. He and the cat have no more illusions:

> Her eyes were tired and dark: eclipsed in them now was that small, sturdy flame which means a desire to go on and which is the secret of life's heroic survival. . .They were full to the amber brims with all of the secrets and sorrows the world can answer our ceaseless questioning with. Loneliness--yes. Hunger. Bewilderment. Pain. All of these things were in them. They wanted no more. They wanted now to be closed on what they had gathered and not have to hold any more.[62]

Like the world of the artist in "The Angel in the Alcove," Lucio's world is hostile. His landlady, however, is at first cordial and even makes love to him, but in the very act is

[60] Ibid., p. 34.

[61] Ibid., p. 45.

[62] Ibid., p. 56.

foreshadowed her later hostility: "Her hand on his shoulder burnt him, stung him painfully as the hide of a steaming horse had once stung his fingers when he touched it as a child."[63] And like the artist's world, his world is described with images of filthy insects. The city's "grey-brown houses were like the dried skins of locusts."[64] The locusts, of course, represent destruction. Limousines speed toward the plant; "glittering black and rushing close to the earth as beetles on desperate errands," they

> disgorged their corpulent contents at private doorways and waited uneasily, like a nest of roaches, in cinder-covered parkways back of the plant. What was hatching inside the conference chambers no one who actually worked at the plant could tell. It took some time for the eggs to incubate: secret and black and laid in coagulate clusters, they ripened slowly. . . .The stockholders had to decide what action to take. . .The answer was obvious. . .One third of the plant shut down and the men were laid off: the black roach-nest dispersed from the cinder parkway: the problem was solved.[65]

Williams has taken the similarity in color between limousines and cockroaches and created a vivid image which clearly shows

[63] Ibid., p. 44.

[64] Ibid., pp. 47-48.

[65] Ibid., pp. 49-50.

his antagonism towards industrial bourgeoisie. "Disgorge their corpulent contents" suggests vomit and filth; "coagulate clusters" conveys the idea of slimy, even bloody, pieces, all about to hatch into some black and secret evil. Franz Kafka's Metamorphosis, in which a traveling salesman is transformed into a cockroach, may have had some influence on Williams's use of the insect image, although Kafka's use is much more sympathetic and crucial to his story. Both Williams and Kafka, however, use animals to show an animal-identity within man himself. This animal-identity is closer to the reality of a human's behavior because it is his deep, inner self. The executives of Williams's plant are in reality devouring and bloodsucking little beasts, against whom their employees feel an impotent rage. The rage that Lucio should feel about the loss of his job--which leads to the loss of his room, the sickness of the cat, and, finally, the loss of his life--is expressed in the malediction uttered by the beggar-drunk who calls himself God:

> "Lies, lies, lies, lies!" he shouted. "They've covered their bodies with lies and they won't stand washing! They want to be scabbed all over, they want no skin but the crust of their greediness on them! Okay, okay, let 'em have it! But let 'em have more and more! Maggots as well as

> lice! Yeah, pile th' friggin' dirt of their friggin' graveyard on 'em, shovel 'em under deep--till I can't smell 'em!"[66]

The lice and maggots, like the cockroaches, represent all the decay and corruption of an industrial society. The fact that lice and maggots are early forms of their types of insects suggests that Williams may believe that the evils of such a society have only begun and are only in their infancy, and that the worst is yet to come.

Another story about a timid little man, "Desire and the Black Masseur," is one of Williams's best, achieving unity in theme and image. Williams skillfully uses imagery throughout the story to point to the devouring cannibalism at the climax. The very first paragraph introduces Anthony Burns--even his name suggests atonement and masochism--as a man who had an instinct for being included in things that devoured him:

> Everything absorbed him and swallowed him up, and still he did not feel secure. He felt more secure at the movies than anywhere else. He loved to sit in the back rows of the movies where the darkness absorbed him gently so that he was like a particle of food dissolving in a big hot mouth. The cinema licked at his mind with a tender, flickering tongue that all but lulled him to sleep. Yes, a big

[66] Ibid., p. 52.

> motherly Nannie of a dog could not have licked him better or given him sweeter repose than the cinema did. . .His mouth would fall open at the movies and saliva would accumulate in it and dribble out the sides of it. . .[67]

The infantile oral fixations of Mr. Burns--he is said to have the unformed look of a child and to move like a child--lead him to a homosexual, masochistic relationship with the black masseur, who becomes Burns's instrument of atonement. Atonement, sexual aberration, and violence are linked in the story. Signi Falk says that "he obviously is trying for an involved religious symbolism, and for him there may be some deep significance between homosexuality, cannibalism, atonement--and the crucifixion and resurrection."[68] In any case, Burns's bizarre methods of making himself whole[69] are detailed with

[67]Tennessee Williams, "Desire and the Black Masseur," One Arm, pp. 83-84.

[68]Falk, p. 45.

[69]A quotation from this story which Benjamin Nelson calls the major philosophical statement on the thought and work of Tennessee Williams makes clear Burns's feeling of incompleteness and desire to become whole: "For the sins of the world are really only its partialities, its incompletions, and these are what suffering must atone for. . . .The nature of man is full of such makeshift arrangements, devised by himself to cover his incompletion. He feels a part of himself to be like a missing wall or a room left unfurnished and he tries as well as he can to make up for it. The use of imagination, resorting to dreams or the loftier pupose of art, is a mask he devises to

several oral images: the steam room where he goes for his atonement is a tremendous mouth, the Negro pours alcohol all over Burns's body, "biting him like insects,"[70] and the black masseur finally takes him to his death-chamber room in which "the curtains blew out like thirsty little white tongues to lick at the street which seemed to reek with an overpowering honey."[71] Burns becomes the slave who is destroyed, a microcosm of the destruction of the universe.

Destruction, mutilation, and redemption are also the themes of "One Arm," but here the protagonist, Oliver Winemiller, is seen as triumphing through his aberrations. Oliver's missing arm is his physical mutilation, and the employment of his body as a prostitute is what he feels to be a moral mutilation. Yet, from the beginning he is set apart from the other

cover his incompletion. Or violence such as a war, between two men or among a number of nations, is also a blind and senseless compensation for that which is not yet formed in human nature. Then there is still another compensation. This one is found in the principle of atonement, the surrender of self to violent treatment by others with the idea of thereby clearing one's self of his guilt" (Williams, "Desire," p. 85). Nelson thinks that "it is apparent that everything Williams has ever written is his personal compensation for what he feels in his incompletion." Benjamin Nelson in Tennessee Williams, p. 191.

[70]Williams, "Desire and the Black Masseur," p. 89.

[71]Ibid., p. 93.

male prostitutes--they search actively for their trade, while he is genuinely unconcerned. "While the two younger boys exhibited the anxious energy of sparrows, darting in and out of bars, flitting across streets and around corners in pursuit of some likely quarry,"[72] he waits to be spoken to and remains in one place. Williams implies praise of "the swarm of his fugitive kind."[73] The primitive strength of this "broken Apollo" is suggested by two animal images, the ape and the panther. As Oliver comes to realize that he has given comfort and pleasure to other twisted and broken people, his desire to live returns and his cell becomes an impossible confinement to him. "He could not remain still for a moment. His heavy foot pads sounded from the end of the hall like an ape's, for he walked barefooted with rapid, shuffling strides around and around the little space of his cage."[74] According to Beryl Rowland, the ape has long been a symbol of lust and of male sexuality,[75] and these are certainly applicable to Oliver. The imprisoned or enchained monkey or ape, however, is found

[72]Williams, "One Arm," One Arm, pp. 7-8.

[73]Ibid., p. 11.

[74]Ibid., p. 20.

[75]Rowland, pp. 8-9.

several times in Williams's work, in "The Night of the Iguana" story, here, and in Battle of Angels when Lady speaks of the the organ grinder's monkey. Rowland notes that the chained monkey symbolizes "the sinner enslaved by his own bodily lusts."[76] This may be one sense in which Williams uses the image, but it is more likely that it is representative of loneliness; that is, of each person's imprisonment "within his own skin" of his own inner feelings and his inability to even recognize or come to terms with those feelings, much less communicate such feelings to anyone else. The other animal image contains the same idea of the imprisoned animal, but the theme of broken beauty is also implicit. A lonely, frustrated Lutheran minister visits Oliver in his cell and recalls his childhood memory of a golden panther, an animal which seems to represent innocence as well as savagery to him, and the way he had longingly cried himself to sleep in pity for the imprisoned animal:

> But one night he had dreamed of the panther in a shameful way. The immense clear eyes radiant with innocence had appeared to him in a forest and he had thought, if I lie down very quietly the panther will come near me and I am not afraid of him because

[76] Ibid., p. 13.

> of our long communions through the bars. . . .Then a little fear started in his nerves. He began to doubt his security with the panther and he was afraid to open his eyes again, but he reached out and. . .gathered some leaves about his shuddering nudity. . .trying to breathe as softly as possible and hoping that now the panther would not discover him. . . .Then all at once he was warm in spite of the windy darkness about him and he realized that the warmth was that of the golden panther coming near him. It was no longer any use trying to conceal himself and it was too late to make an attempt at flight, and so with a sigh the dreamer uncurled his body from its tight position and lay outstretched and spread-eagled in an attitude of absolute trust and submission. Something began to stroke him and presently because of its liquid heat he realized that it was the tongue of the beast bathing him as such animals bathe their young, starting at his feet but progressing slowly up the length of his legs until the narcotic touch arrived at his loins. . . . He had visited the golden panther only once after that and had found himself unable to meet the radiant scrutiny of the beast without mortification. . . . But here was the look of the golden panther again, the innocence in the danger, an exact parallel so unmistakably clear. . . .[77]

The phrase "the innocence in the danger" suggests not only the ambiguity of this image but also suggests that the problem of evil, sin if you will, is under discussion. An almost identical image appears in De Quincey's "The English Mail-Coach," in which the author tries to warn the young people in the coach of impending disaster, but is paralyzed by fear, which

[77] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

De Quincey analyzes for several pages. The key passage is this:

> The situation here contemplated exposes a dreadful ulcer, lurking far down in the depths of human nature. . . .Potentially, and in shadowy outline, such a trial is moving subterraneously in perhaps all men's natures. Upon the secret mirror of our dreams such a trial is darkly projected, perhaps, to every one of us. That dream, so familiar to childhood, of meeting a lion, and, through languishing prostration in hope and the energies of hope, that constant sequel of lying down before the lion, publishes the secret frailty of human nature--reveals its deep-seated falsehood to itself--records its abysmal treachery. Perhaps not one of us escapes that dream; perhaps, as by some sorrowful doom of man, that dream repeats for every one of us, through every generation, the original temptation in Eden.[78]

Thus De Quincy anticipates psychoanalysis with his interpretation of the dream as representing feelings of guilt and moral frailty--a moral paralysis of the will. Williams alludes to Eden in his passage about the panther by showing the dreamer's guilt at his own nudity and his attempts to cover himself with leaves, as Adam did in his shame. The fear that the dreamer feels is the fear of moral danger half-buried in our unconscious and deep-rooted in the psychological experience of the race,

[78]Thomas De Quincey, The English Mail Coach and Other Essays (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1961), p. 27.

as De Quincey suggests. Thus the panther represents the moral weakness, the unregulated passions of a man without any spiritual center. At the same time, the lines suggest the essentially pure spirit of Oliver. An old superstition was that the breath of the panther, an animal known for its beauty, was so sweetly fragrant that it allured men, beasts, and cattle to inhale it; Jesus was spoken of as Rabbi Ban Panther and as the son of one Panther,[79] and a prophetic reference to Jesus as "panther to Ephraim" in Hosea V:14 led to an allegory of Christ as the panther.[80] The passage is a telling one, demonstrating Williams's own ambiguity towards personalities such as Oliver. The panther image underlines basic themes in the work of the playwright: the problems of morality and moral paralysis, the theme of broken beauty, the delicate quality of communication, the mystical quality of giving which glorifies such characters as One Arm, and the preoccupation with sex and deviant forms of sexuality.

Sexual divergence is also detailed in two companion stories which are variations of the same theme in the same

[79]Bayley, i, 85.

[80]Borges, p. 178.

setting--"Hard Candy" and "The Mysteries of the Joy Rio." Bird images are the most frequent in these two stories, and they fit the familiar Williams pattern. In the earlier story, "The Mysteries of the Joy Rio," Pablo Gonzales, now lonely and dying of cancer, had once been the apprentice and lover of Mr. Kroger, now deceased. Kroger was never certain that Pablo "the incalculably precious bird flown into his nest was not one of sudden passage but rather the kind that prefers to keep a faithful commitment to a single place, the nest-building kind, and not only that, but the very rare-indeed-kind that gives love back as generously as he takes it. . . .Pablo had never flown. But the sweet bird of youth had flown from Pablo Gonzales. . . ."[81] The main character of the other story, Mr. Krupper of "Hard Candy," is also associated with a bird. He, too, is one of the outsiders, "a bird of a different feather"[82] who carries hard candy to the movie house to attract homosexual contacts. These contacts may be associated with birds, too, for as Mr. Krupper takes the candy from the shop and feeds the literal birds, his cousin remarks, "It looks like the birds were hungry."[83] The candy itself, his means to attract his

[81]Williams, "Mysteries of the Joy Rio," Hard Candy, p. 206.

[82]Williams, "Hard Candy," Hard Candy, p. 110.

[83]Ibid., p. 105.

homosexual "birds," is also compared to birds: "he shuffled along the block, usually with one hand clasped over the pocket containing the bag of hard candies as if it were a bird that might spring out again. . ."[84] Once Krupper is inside the movie house, the images turn to those of beasts. The old man deposits himself on the seat "with the stiff-kneed elaboration of an old camel,"[85] next to a young man to whom he offers the candy; the young man crunches the candy between his jaws "steadily, with the automatic, invariable rhythm of a horse masticating his food."[86] The dirtiness of the theater and one condition of the people who frequent it is shown in this image from "The Mysteries of the Joy Rio": once Pablo had been so embarrassed when the lights came on at the theater that "he had buried his nose in the collar of his coat and had scuttled out as quickly as a cockroach makes for the nearest shadow when a kitchen light comes on."[87] He is ashamed of the dirty truth about his life. The usher who pursues Pablo has a voice "as shrill as a jungle bird's"[88] and Pablo flees to the balcony

[84]Ibid., p. 107.

[85]Ibid., p. 115.

[86]Ibid., p. 119.

[87]Williams, "Mysteries of the Joy Rio," p. 207.

[88]Ibid., p. 217.

where he sees an apparition of the old man, his lover. Pablo's panic disappears "and the breathing slowed down and stopped hurting the chest as if a fox was caught in it."[89] The fox, usually a sexual symbol, points out the relationship between Pablo and Mr. Kroger; its close connection with the heart here further suggests that Pablo is symbolically dying of a broken heart because of his loneliness after the death of Mr. Kroger. Thus the images illuminate the loneliness theme in these two stories, as well as the theme of sexual perversity.

The perversity of a sado-masochistic sexual relationship is detailed in another short story in Hard Candy, called "Rubio Y Morena." The central character, a struggling young writer, forms a semi-permanent relationship with Amada, a whore he had met in Laredo. She is most often compared to a horse: her hips are said to be as large as the rump of a horse, her feet clop awkwardly around,[90] and "her head seemed almost as big as the head of a horse and the familiar, coarse hair was hanging like a horse's mane about her scrawny neck and shoulders."[91] The horse image here is obviously sexual.

[89] Ibid., p. 219.

[90] Williams, "Rubio Y Morena," Hard Candy, p. 129.

[91] Ibid., p. 140.

Like a horse, Amada is a dumb beast fit only for his use and abuse; she suffers in silence while he builds his confidence and dominance with women. "For a month she sat in the corner and watched him, watched him with the dumb, wanting look of an animal in pain."[92] Their relationship exists only to build his own ego, to service him: "he would rouse her from sleep with the brutal haste of a bull in loveless coupling."[93] She finally leaves him, and he later goes to search for her. But the female figures of her family are hostile to him, "half smiling and half snarling at him like a pack of wild dogs,"[94] and become even more hostile: they close about him like a wolf pack.[95] Finally, the shell of his ego is broken through when he hears her calling Rubio, her affectionate name for him: "from some recess of the building, a loud, hoarse voice was lifted like the crow of a cock."[96] The cock's crowing, of course, symbolizes an awakening to the fact that he loves

[92]Ibid., p. 137.

[93]Ibid., p. 126.

[94]Ibid., p. 139.

[95]Ibid., p. 144.

[96]Ibid., p. 139.

her. But the breaking of his narcissistic shell has come too late; the woman dies and he is left alone.

Two characters in "Mama's Old Stucco House," Jimmy Krenning, an artist who tries to paint but is evidently thwarted by his feelings towards his mother, and Brinda, the young black girl, are also left alone by death. Like Amada of the previous story, Brinda exists to Jimmy merely as an animal for service; he looks at her "as if she were not a young girl and not even human, as if she were a dog in there waiting on him."[97] Brinda and her mama are both described as dogs, probably to suggest loyalty as well as patience. Brinda's mama "panted like an old dog" from her sickness and the exertion of going to the stucco house to check up on Mr. Jimmy;[98] Brinda later sits and waits for Jimmy and her mama to revive from the exertion of their ordeal after the death of his mother "with the uncomprehending patience of a dog."[99] Contrasted with the patience of the Negroes is the violence,

[97]Tennessee Williams, "Mama's Old Stucco House," The Knightly Quest: A Novella and Four Short Stories (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 105.

[98]Ibid., p. 108.

[99]Ibid., p. 119.

suggested by animal images, in the Krennings' stucco house. Brinda sees inside Jimmy's studio "a scene of violence as if a storm, or a demon, had been caged in it, but now it was very quiet, only a fly buzzed in it."[100] Jimmy's mother had had her stroke because he violently kicked the door down in his rage at not having a key to the stucco house:

> I just kicked the goddamn door in. I kicked it in and she let out with a cry like a pig being slaughtered. And when I entered, when I come in the kicked-open door, she was lyin' here paralyzed on this here livin'-room floor. . .[101]

A symbol of the violence hidden in the house is the animalistic male nurse, who had tried to assault Brinda and who lacks any compassion towards his paralyzed patient; he is said to have arms like hams and is repulsively coarse. At the end of the story, after Jimmy and Brinda's mama have come to an agreement "because of the sad, inescapable thing that gave them a closeness," Brinda is locked out just as Jimmy had been, and they are left to take care of each other.

Two characters who are given the opportunity to take care of each other's needs but fail to do so are Jimmy Dobyne

[100] _Ibid._, p. 109.

[101] _Ibid._, p. 114.

and Mrs. Goforth in "Man Bring This Up Road." This story, a forerunner of The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, pits a destitute poet against a wealthy, narcissistic patron of the arts. Here is a repetition of the destruction of the weak, artistic person at the hands of the coarse, vigorous landlady types of the world. To Mrs. Goforth Jimmy is merely a sexual object with which she can build up her sense of self. In a weak pun she calls him her "Trojan horse guest,"[102] and his image is that of the goat, a sexual image: only those agile as mountain goats can reach Mrs. Goforth's villa by land, and Jimmy comes by this goat path. Mrs. Goforth has many animals on her estate--cocker spaniels, a kitten that gazes narcissus-like into a fishpool, an aviary of tropical birds, and a monkey chained to a pillar--but ironically, she is probably allergic to all of them.[103] The fact that she keeps these pets symbolizes the way she relates to human beings--and it is her desire to keep people as objects that mutilates her, just as she is overcome by sneezing when she keeps her pets. The monkey is an image reminiscent of the iguana:

[102] Williams, "Man Bring This Up Road," The Knightly Quest, p. 127.

[103] Ibid., pp. 137-138.

> Jimmy looked at the monkey; its enchainment, he thought, could hardly be anything but a punitive measure. Near it was a bowl containing remnants of fruit but there was no water bowl and the length of chain did not permit the monkey to get into shade. Not far from the reach of the chain was the fishpool and the monkey had stretched its chain as far toward the pool as it could, which was not far enough to reach it.[104]

In the same vindictive way Mrs. Goforth puts food just out of the reach of the hungry Dobyne. She is like the narcissistic cat and the small bright-plumaged birds she keeps (at one point she speaks "tonelessly as a parrot");[105] she dresses in a grotesque halter and shorts outfit to call attention to her body and then removes her costume and calls Jimmy to join her. When he reacts in shocked amazement to the sight and she abruptly dismisses him, he breaks down in sobs, and for a few minutes she responds openly and with warmth:

> Some other person seemed to move into her body and take possession of her and she went to the sobbing young man and took him somewhat gingerly in her arms and pressed his head somewhat carefully to her bosom, as if it might break against her like a bird's egg.[106]

[104] _Ibid_., pp. 127-8.

[105] _Ibid_., p. 129.

[106] _Ibid_., p. 141.

She could fulfill the needs of the fragile artist, but all too soon she returns to her hardness and forces Jimmy to go, leaving them both entirely alone.

"Happy August the 10th" details a rift between two women, Horne and Elphinstone, who live together in New York. They keep a panamanian parrot, Lorita, which seems to sense the domestic crisis and makes quiet chucking sounds and musical whistles as if to pacify the ladies.[107] Lorita is another of Williams's imprisoned animals, a bird which has sacrificed freedom for the luxury of security. The women's comments about her freedom illustrate their own personalities. Horne says that Lorita is in her cage on the terrace, on her travels in a summer palace, a spacious and fancy cage outside; Elphinstone says, "someday that bird is going to discover that she can fly, and then good-bye Lorita!"[108] Elphinstone is said to bristle "like a hedge hog" (p. 258) when she meets Horne's friends, and she clings with animal tenacity to the habit of existence (p. 260) while withdrawing from the housekeeper's lizard-chill fingers. The story, though minor, is a good description of the interaction between two people.

[107]Tennessee Williams, "Happy August the 10th," Esquire, LXXVIII (December, 1972), 258.

[108]Ibid., p. 257.

"The Red Part of a Flag or Oriflamme," written in 1944 and not published until 1974, is another study of a fragile outsider, a woman who buys a red dress in which to die. Her death is symbolized by a gigantic equestrian statue; its hooves are level with her eyes, and it looks as if it is about to step on her.[109] Williams experiments with subtle color symbolism in this story, and the final key image combines use of color and animal symbolism. The woman can be equated with the sparrows who come to the park to drink from a shallow cement bowl, but the bowl is dry. The park is all green, and the woman thinks

> The green has to be taken gently. Not swallowed but sipped the way birds do water if bowls aren't dry. . . .Green is the stuff that sweeps you down and under. . .A butterfly boat that a child lets go in the dusk is safer than I in the middle of this green breaking.[110]

The birds and the butterflies suggest the woman's fragility. She is finally associated with the fountain itself as she dies of tuberculosis. Williams cleverly inverts that image of the fountain of life to mean a fountain of death: "Close

[109]Tennessee Williams, "The Red Part of a Flag or Oriflamme," Vogue, CLXIII (March, 1974), 158.

[110]Ibid., p. 159.

to the one where the birds were disappointed, Anna herself was all at once a fountain. The foam of a scarlet ocean crossed her lips. Oh, oh. The ocean the butterfly boat is a voyager on. . . ."[111]

Another tubercular death is detailed in the highly autobiographical story "'Grand,'" about Williams's grandmother. He writes, "I saw my grandmother moving alone. . .like a stalking crane, so straight and tall for an old lady and so unbelievably thin!"[112] The crane, according to Cirlot, is a traditional symbol of longevity and also represents the good and diligent soul,[113] so it is a fitting image for "Grand." In other bird imagery Williams tells of the time his grandfather sold all the bonds "Grand" had worked so hard to save to two con men called carrion birds, "those rusty-feathered birds of prey."[114] As purification for selling the bonds, his grandfather, an Episcopalian minister, burns all his sermons. Although this is a story about death and loss, Williams's

[111] Ibid.

[112] Williams, "'Grand,'" The Knightly Quest, p. 180.

[113] Cirlot, p. 63.

[114] Williams, "'Grand,'" p. 179.

affection for his grandmother allows the characters to have dignity. "Grand" is not defeated by her circumstances.

The religious theme appears in a still lighter tone in the fable "The Yellow Bird," which Signi Falk calls a "successful excursion into humor and fantasy."[115] It tells the story of the moral decline of Alma Tutwiler, the forerunner of many Southern gentlewomen in Williams's plays, especially Alma Winemiller of Summer and Smoke. A yellow bird named Bobo, representing the flesh, is said to be the interlocutor between the early Goody Tutwiler of the Salem witch trials and Satan himself; Goody's own husband then testifies against her, saying that he has seen the yellow bird in his church on the Sabbath whispering indecent things to him about several younger women in the congregation. Goody Tutwiler is properly hanged, but the yellow bird Bobo has manifested itself in one form or another, "and its continual nagging had left the Puritan spirit fiercely aglow, from Salem to Hobbs, Arkansas. . ."[116] where the story takes place. The twentieth century Alma Tutwiler changes from the shy mousy minister's daughter to the brazen

[115]Falk, pp. 41-42.

[116]Williams, "The Yellow Bird," One Arm, pp. 199-200.

town prostitute, complete with bleached blonde hair. "With the new blond hair you could hardly call her a dark horse, but she was certainly running away with the field."[117] Her vigor for the free life should have ended in suffering or a horrible death, but instead she bears a male child who, according to the fantasy, crawls out in the morning and returns in the evening with fistfuls of jewels and gold. After her death the son erects a curious monument of three sexless figures astride a leaping dolphin, which may represent pagan erotic deities, one carrying a crucifix, one a cornucopia, and the third a Grecian lyre. "On the side of the plunging fish, the arrogant dolphin, was a name inscribed, the odd name of Bobo."[118] The free, Cavalier spirit, represented by the dolphin, and the perky yellow bird (is its white purity stained?) triumphs over the grim Puritan tradition.

Another character who gives up the struggle between soul and body and lets the body take over is Chicken[119] of "The Kingdom of Earth," an early sketch in a light tone of the play by the same name. Chicken describes himself as a lustful

[117] Ibid., p. 205.

[118] Ibid., pp. 210-211.

[119] Chicken's name is explained in the play Kingdom of Earth. See chapter five.

creature determined on satisfaction; when he tries to close the gates of the soul on the body, all he does is let the mosquitoes in the house. The mosquitoes represent confusion and surrender to the lower passions. The insect as representative of baser passions is made clear in Williams's use of the bee image. "Between my legs that big old thing was throbbing. Yep, just burning and throbbing like a bee had stung it, and not a gate did I have to close against it."[120] Chicken's attitude towards religion as being no help to mankind is expressed when he prays to God to send Myrtle, the new wife of his fatally ill brother, to bed with him:

> What sort of God would pay attention to a prayer like that coming from someone like me who is sold to the Devil when thousands of good people's prayers, such as prayers for the sick and suffering and dying, are given no mind, no more than so many crickets buzzing outdoors in the summer.[121]

Most of the animal imagery suggests the bestial nature of the characters; much of it describes sexual romps. Chicken can hear Lot and Myrtle copulating, "panting like two hound-dogs;"[122]

[120]Williams, "The Kingdom of Earth," The Knightly Quest, p. 156.

[121]Ibid., p. 162.

[122]Ibid., p. 150.

he says, "I could hear them grunting together like a pair of pigs in a sty in a dusty place in the sun when the spring's getting warm."[123] Myrtle laughs like a horse, and she describes her first sexual adventure with a store manager who was "like a great big bull."[124] Myrtle and Chicken are highly attracted to each other (she says, "The minute I laid eyes on you. . .I said to myself, Oh, oh, your goose is cooked, Myrtle!" and he replies, "Well, when somebody's goose is cooked the best way to have it is cooked with plenty of gravy."),[125] and they make love the second night she spends at the family house. While they are in bed, Lot is dying and calls out to them. The next morning the adulterous pair go to Lot's bedroom to find his body in a stream of blood from the bed to the door: "the bed was just like a hog had been kilt on it."[126] The pair are such healthy animals that they are fairly remorseless over Lot's death and they "hitch up" with each other. Chicken is no longer "lonesome as a lost dog,"[127] standing in his

[123] Ibid., p. 154.

[124] Ibid., p. 160.

[125] Ibid., p. 161.

[126] Ibid., p. 163.

[127] Ibid., p. 148.

kitchen door listening to the sad sounds of a hound-dog baying; he has gotten rid of those spiritual gates and is happily enjoying his lust, just as Alma of "The Yellow Bird" did.

Another of these lusty characters is Olga of "The Mattress by the Tomato Patch." Olga is a massive, primitive woman who goes through life happily fornicating and smilingly approving of everyone else who does. She takes joyous pleasure in merely being alive: "She sniffs like a dog at the morning, grins connivingly at it, and shouts, Around this way!"[128] Williams is using the dog image here as a traditional symbol of lust and lasciviousness. Olga "laps up life with the tongue of a female bull."[129] Williams invests her with much more dignity by calling her a female bull than by using the term cow; by using bull, he implies her life force--the bull has been worshipped almost universally both for its power and for its exceptional fertilizing ability.[130] Olga is married to an invalid, "a mean and sick little beast that once mated with her,"[131] who calls the fornicating couples who frequent

[128]Williams, "The Mattress by the Tomato Patch," Hard Candy, p. 153.

[129]Ibid., p. 160.

[130]Rowland, p. 44.

[131]Williams, "Mattress," p. 156.

the hotel "pigs, pigs, pigs." Olga is able to understand his feelings towards her "with an animal's sense of what goes on behind it,"[132] but she does not pay much attention to him. Williams writes that she saves her fury for the true beast within us, the beast of mendacity, "the beast that tells mean lies."[133] She has a cocker spaniel named Freckles, as indolent as she is, and a lover named Tiger, who is a wrestler on the beach. Each probably symbolizes something in Olga: the dog, her innocence and laziness; the wrestler, her rapacious sexual appetite. Tiger called her a fat old cow once, "but only a few moments later the noises that came through the wall made me think of the dying confessions of a walrus."[134] When Olga thinks of all her lovers, she "feels all the weight of them resting lightly on her as the weight of one bird with various hurrying wings, staying just long enough to satisfy her and not a moment longer."[135] This is much the way Williams used the bird image in the poem "Everyman." "The Mattress by the Tomato Patch" is a light story of earthycontentment in the

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid., p. 159.

[134] Ibid., p. 161.

[135] Ibid., p. 154.

California sun, which Williams describes at length with his familiar image of the rocking-horse:

> The wonderful rocking-horse weather of California goes rocking over our heads and over the galleries of Olga's summer hotel. It goes rocking over the acrobats and their slim-bodied partners, over the young cadets. . . , over the ocean that catches the blaze of the moment, over the pier at Venice, over the roller coasters and over the vast beach-homes of the world's most successful kept women--not only over those persons and paraphernalia, but over all that is shared in the commonwealth of existence. It has rocked over me all summer, and over my afternoons. . . .It has gone rocking over accomplishments and defeats; it has covered it all and absorbed the wounds with the pleasures and made no discrimination. For nothing is quite so cavalier as this horse. The giant blue rocking-horse weather of Southern California is rocking and rocking with all the signs pointing forward. Its plumes are smoky blue ones the sky can't hold and so lets grandly go of. . .[136]

The last line here is almost identical to one in "The Poet," and suggests essentially the same ideas. It might be well to note here, however, that the rocking-horse, or hobbyhorse, is a symbol of virility. Beryl Rowland points out that in Shakespeare's time hobbyhorse could mean a lustful, loose woman, and today means a topic in which one has an obsessive interest.[137] Since the story is about a summer in which there

[136] Ibid., pp. 159-160.

[137] Rowland, pp. 104-105.

is obsessive interest in sex, it is not unlikely that Williams intended such associations.

A different kind of summer, one of discontent and heated passions, is detailed in "Three Players of a Summer Game," seed of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. While the principal image is that of the croquet game, which to Brick Pollitt represents his life and the slow, precise effort at regaining his masculinity and self-respect, animal images in the story center around insects, birds, and bulls. Before the summer of the croquet games Brick had married Maggie, but their marriage had gone into a decline. Brick began to see his life as something disgusting; and as his interest in life and work ebbed, Maggie took over and virtually assumed his masculinity:

> It was as though she had her lips fastened to some invisible wound in his body through which drained out of him and flowed into her the assurance and vitality that he had owned before marriage. Margaret Pollitt lost her pale, feminine prettiness and assumed in its place something more impressive--a firm and rough-textured sort of handsomeness that came out of her indefinite chrysalis as mysteriously as one of those metamorphoses that occur in insect life.[138]

[138]Williams, "Three Players of a Summer Game," Three Players of a Summer Game, p. 10.

The idea of balance is implicit here: what Brick loses, Maggie gains, sucking away Brick's vitality as a leech would suck blood. The leech-like insects sucking away Brick's life-blood appear as the mosquitoes which plague Mary Louise, the twelve-year-old daughter of the widow who is Brick's mistress and whose life Brick manages for the summer of the story. Mary Louise deals with the burn of mosquito bites by freezing them to numbness with a lump of ice--much as Brick is seeking to numb himself to his marital problems by drinking. (Williams plays with the idea of coolness--or freezing--throughout the story, stating that Brick is seeking coolness in his clothes; describing the widow's house as being painted the blue-white glitter of a block of ice in the sun; identifying coolness with sounds: voices as being as cool-sounding as particles of ice in a tall shaken glass; the cool summer sound of wind against a boat's sail; the even cooler sound of the chatter of beads,"polished bird's eggs turned solid.")[139] The little girl warns that scratching the bites will leave a permanent scar; her own skin is smooth and tender except when it is temporarily mutilated by mosquito bites. Nevertheless, the insects continue to annoy her:

[139]*Ibid.*, p. 8.

> "Oh, Mother," she would moan, "I'm simply being devoured by mosquitoes!"
> "Darling," her mother would answer, "that's dreadful, but you know that Mother can't help it; she didn't create the mosquitoes and she can't destroy them for you!"[140]

In the same way, the widow Grey cannot destroy Brick's problems for him. Mary Louise is associated with insects as well because she spends the summer catching lightning bugs and putting them in mason jars; she runs "straight as a bee"[141] to a sculpture of a reclining male nude in a museum; and as if she were on display in a glass box, she sits like a lap dog in the electric car "with its buzzing no louder than a summer insect's."[142]

The quiet sounds of the summer appear also in the voices of Mary Louise and her mother: "They would retire from the croquet lawn and stand off at a little distance, calling softly, 'Brick, Brick' and 'Mr. Pollitt,' like a pair of complaining doves."[143] The dove motif is repeated with "the faint, cooing voice of the widow"[144] in counterpoint to Brick's clownish

[140] Ibid., p. 21.

[141] Ibid., p. 14.

[142] Ibid., p. 25.

[143] Ibid., p. 23.

[144] Ibid., p. 24.

antics on the lawn. Once, in answer to Mary Louise's wailing cries to play croquet, the widow comes to the window "like a white bird flying into some unnoticed obstruction"[145] and answers the little girl in a shocking cry of rage. The obstruction may be the deceit in carrying on an affair with Brick, since the dove symbolizes guilelessness and since the soft, dovelike sounds emitted most of the time by the widow are in direct contrast to the shouts of rage which characterize this scene.

The bull images are introduced by Brick, as he takes birdlike sips of his liquor. He says that the way to handle his drinking problem is to "wear it down little by little, like a bullfighter handles a bull in a ring."[146] This same kind of finesse, this skill, is the way he plays croquet. He sees himself as sure as the bullfighter, when in reality he is the bull:

> . . .some little shadow of uncertainty would touch him again, get through the wall of his liquor, some tricky little shadow of a thought, as sly as a mouse, quick, dark, too sly to be caught, and. . .he would

[145] Ibid., p. 22.

[146] Ibid., p. 15.

> make this enormous fall. . . .Then slowly, slowly, the way a bull trots uncertainly back from its first wild, challenging plunge into the ring, he would fasten one hand over his belt and raise the other one to his head,. . .as if he dimly imagined that by feeling that dome he might be able to guess what was hidden inside it, the dark and wondering stuff beneath that dome. . .[147]

Jack Randolph Conrad writes that the modern bullfight, which was originally a great fertility rite performed to impregnate the land with new life, is a ritual whose one aim is to kill the bull; the ideal is for a brave and skillful man to dominate and kill a brave, powerful bull. He sees in the bullfight a symbolic act of authority slain by the brave individual.[148] We can see these attempts to challenge authority, to challenge the authority which Margaret has assumed, in Brick's attempts to make a new life, to regain his old vitality. In this, he tries to gain the skill of the bullfighter--or croquet player. Ironically, however, he is destroyed, because he is the bull, doomed to death, and not the bullfighter. Brick had at one time rebelled against Maggie's authority: he "played possum" and then got up and "turkey-trotted" the man that was overseeing his plantation out the door; he got back his

[147] Ibid., pp. 19-20.

[148] Conrad, pp. 121, 189-193.

driver's license, a symbol of virility and authority, and he took over the widow's affairs. But in the end he returns to being dominated by Margaret; she drives the car and in the back seat sits "the sheepishly grinning and nodding figure of Brick Pollitt."[149] He is beauty being led away, marred by his failure to be a man, similar to the mutilated Apollo Oliver Winemiller of "One Arm" as he was led to his execution.

Thus we see in Williams's short stories a repeated use of animal images to deepen recurring themes. The outsider, whether he be artist, poet, foreigner, cripple, or athlete, is doomed to be destroyed. As Benjamin Nelson puts it, "Williams is presenting his view of man's cruelty to man, man's isolation and loneliness, and the doomed fragility of beauty in a fragmented and guilt-ridden world. Loss is the keynote of every story."[150] The sense of loss and isolation is flashed to the reader in a series of images which intensify the plight of these broken characters. Many of the same images appear in Williams's longer fiction.

[149]Williams, "Three Players," p. 31.

[150]Nelson, p. 196.

IV. ANIMAL IMAGES IN WILLIAMS'S LONGER FICTION

Tennessee Williams has written two longer fiction works, The Knightly Quest and The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone. Each presents major concerns of Williams: the role of the artist in society, the destructive nature of time, and the upside-downness of a world in which creation can become destruction and destruction can be creation.

The Knightly Quest, a novella with the appropriate pun on "knightly," was described by Williams as "a fantastic satire of a Southern town which has become the seat of a military project." With its quixotic character of Gewinner Pearce, the novella relates clearly to the problems of interpretation in Camino Real. The setting is a sterile Southern town recently revitalized economically by The Project, which is engaged day and night in the development of "some marvelously mysterious weapon of annihilation." Like the town of Camino Real, it is crawling with armed guards. When Gewinner returns to the town after several years of travel, he is keenly aware of its decadence and spiritual deterioration:

> The sylvan park whose trees had been mostly willows had turned into a concrete playground full of

> monkeys disguised as children. . . .I remember [says Gewinner] it being like a romantic ballet setting. I mean swans drifted about on a lake and there were cranes, herons, flamingos and even a peacock with several peahens around him, but now there's not a willow and not a swan or a lake for a swan to drift in.[1]

These birds represent the romance and beauty of what was. The traditional symbolic meanings of peacocks and swans is particularly interesting in view of the ending and the theme of The Knightly Quest. According to Cirlot, the peacock represents totality, or the unity and psychic duality of man; it also represents the immortality of the incorruptible soul.[2] The swan is an even more appropriate symbol of Gewinner and the romance he longs for, because it is by the swan that the hero is wafted heavenward, plucking on a harp and accepting death gratefully as he soars to higher regions.[3] Cirlot recognizes the swan as a complex symbol, representing a union of opposites; it may even represent hermaphroditism, for it is masculine in its long phallic neck, feminine in its round

[1]Tennessee Williams, The Knightly Quest (New York: New Directions, 1966), pp. 5-6.

[2]Cirlot, p. 239.

[3]Ibid., p. 277.

body. It may represent the complete satisfaction of desire; the swan-song alludes to the swan's desire, which brings about its own death. In this way the swan image relates to the moth image as used by Williams. Another explanation of the song of the dying swan is that the swan and the harp are essential symbols of the mystic journey to the other world (apart from the death-ship, which symbol Williams uses in the novella). The swan/harp symbols also have some bearing on the peacock symbol: the swan/harp represent water/fire, melancholy and passion, self-sacrifice, tragic art, and martyrdom; conversely, the peacock/lute represent earth/air, or logical thought.[4] Thus in the first animal image Williams alludes to the nature of Gewinner, the conclusion of the novella, and the theme of romance. The romantic theme continues with another passage in which Gewinner is compared to Don Quixote mounted on a steed whose ribs are as protuberant as his own. The old knight and Sancho Panza are closely associated with birds: "Birds know them [American romantics as well as Quixote and Sancho] and understand them better than men. Have you ever seen the skeleton of a bird? If

[4]Ibid., pp. 306-307.

you have, you will know how completely they are still flying. . . ."[5] These romantics have what Williams calls the true heart of man, and their skeletons are too elastic and springy to be broken.[6] Williams continues to say that the romantic artist has the capacity to change things with his vision, to transform his view of reality into art.[7] In the same way that the artist can make this transformation, Gewinner Pearce is able to transform the intolerable reality of his hometown, with its project, its Laughing Boy drive-in restaurant, and its prison with dogs guarding the grounds, into a beautiful dream of salvation in the Ark of Space, which Williams calls a reassuring touch of romanticism. Gewinner blows up the town into a million fragments (this fragmentation is a key to Williams's writing process; see chapter seven). The romantic gets his revenge on the town of Gewinner--ironically the town which he hates is named after him; perhaps it represents his alter ego, those things he

[5]The Knightly Quest, pp. 83-84.

[6]Ibid., pp. 82-83.

[7]For a discussion of how Williams views the artist as the alchemist of the romantic and some pertinent quotations from this novella, see chapter seven.

hates in himself.

Many of the characters who represent the town are described with animal images, usually to make them appear more ridiculous or more bestial. Gewinner's mother writes to him that

> The First Lady is more fun than a barrel or a boatload of monkeys. . . .While the Chief and my precious boy Braden were deciding where to strike next and what to strike with, you would never have guessed from our fun and frolic that anything more serious than a possum hunt was going on anywhere in the world. . . .We had the Wildcat Five which you know are the latest craze. . .and we had a couple of boxing kangaroos with a dog referee. . . .The photographers and newspaper boys had a field day, they went absolutely hog-wild,. . .and Babe shot like a cannonball over to my boy Braden and caught him in such a bear hug that I was scared for a second she'd crack his ribs.[8]

Williams is satirizing the sixties in this passage: the craze of naming rock bands for animals ("Wildcat Five"), Luci Johnson's bugaloo (Babe's bear hug), and the First Family's Texas barbecues and outrageous entertainments (possum hunts, boxing kangaroos, etc.). Clichés abound, and Williams purposely makes his unsavory characters utter such hackneyed expressions as "blind as ten bats in a belfry," "a frog in her

[8]Williams, The Knightly Quest, pp. 12-13.

throat," "the cat out of the bag," "now hold your horses," and "you don't drink enough to keep a bird alive." Braden, for example, calls General Olds "that old war horse,"[9] and Gewinner wires home "kill no fatted calf"[10] to tell of his return. The playwright also satirizes the American penchant for naming our suburbs "Rainbow Lands and Bluebird Hills" and for creating complacent segregated communities out of them. In a town such as Gewinner, evidently named after the protagonist, the serious people go to bed early and get up with the chickens.[11] Mother Braden is constantly planning parties for the President's visits; her entertainment is usually a cultural event such as "an Indian chief coming to wrestle an alligator."[12] Braden Pearce, Gewinner's older brother, is described in bestial terms; he is called one of those "bullish men who shatter all opposition by the sheer weight and energy of their drive."[13] Braden and his wife Violet are very vocal in their

[9] Ibid., p. 92.

[10] Ibid., p. 15.

[11] Ibid., p. 41.

[12] Ibid., p. 92.

[13] Ibid., p. 18.

lovemaking, and their noises are heard throughout the Braden house. Williams says that they "made noises like beasts of the jungle when they had sex, which was about every night. At his climax, Braden would howl and curse, and at hers, Violet would cry out like a yard full of peacocks."[14] Mother Braden's guests playing bridge hear this, and Gewinner comments, "Oh, there goes Violet like a yard full of peacocks. . ."[15] Here Williams is referring to the noise, not the visual beauty, of the peacocks. After their "furious assaults on the siege of inertia," Braden always orders chicken and French fries from the drive-in across the street, and in an obvious image to illustrate sexuality and pride in sexuality Williams says the likeliest guess as to how Braden feels afterwards "is that he felt like a rooster on a back fence at the sign of daybreak."[16] The drive-in across the street is particularly odious to Gewinner; it represents all that the town has become and is owned by Billy Spangler, an old high school pal of Braden who is obsessed by the word "girl" even more persistently than by

[14] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

[15] Ibid., p. 24.

[16] Ibid., p. 26.

the idea of spies and counterspies in the town and The Project. Billy thinks of himself as being clever and is referred to as being foxy, an image which suggests his lustful nature as well as his constant suspicion and fear of spies. When Billy interviews a girl to be a waitress in his drive-in, he always asks her two questions: How she feels about Gloria Butterfield (a famous spy at The Project who had been caught delivering blueprints to two old women and a man who were posing as her relatives), and how she feels about love. "Billy Spangler opened his mouth and smiled and let his mouth hang a bit open after that foxy question."[17] He interviews Gladys for the job, and concerning the alleged spy Gloria Butterfield she says, "Any girl who would be that treacherous and that stupid deserved to be torn to pieces by wild dogs." Her comment about wild dogs makes Billy suspicious of her, since he has inside information that Butterfield had in fact been torn to pieces by dogs.[18] The dogs represent the hatred, fear, and repression of the militaristic society. The site of The Project resembles an enormous penitentiary which is patrolled

[17] Ibid., p. 64.

[18] Ibid., p. 66. The symbology of dogs is discussed in the section on Orpheus Descending in chapter six.

by uniformed men with dogs:

> The dogs seemed to want to go faster than the men, they kept tugging at their leads and glancing back crossly at the men. Then the dogs would look ahead again with expressions that could be described as fiercely glaring. The men's and dogs' heads would pivot slightly from right to left and left to right as if the men and dogs had gone to the same training school and come out equally proficient at the art of patrolling, and it would be hard to say, if you had to, which glared more fiercely, the human guards or the dogs.[19]

Fear of the nameless enemy is also suggested by wolves and foxes: "God knows how many of the men who work at The Project were concealing little foxes of terror under their radiationproof uniforms and helmets."[20] Even the priest is afraid, as Williams takes another jab at religion: "Father Acheson had remarked that Protestantism and atheism were holding open the door to the wolves of Asia. . ."[21] The Project casts a pallor of fear over the entire town; Williams writes that the hum of activity at The Project "moved through the air like the purring of some giant cat that never slept nor changed its

[19] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[20] Ibid., p. 58.

[21] Ibid., p. 87.

menacingly crouched position."[22] A crime wave engulfs the town, and the police are so paralyzed by fear that the whole force is finally sent to Camp Tranquillity (about which there are ugly rumors that people who go there are never heard of again) and are replaced by government agents in armored cars. One of the policemen had described the outbreak of crime thus: "It was like a big black cat had jumped on me,. . .and from this statement was derived the name 'Black Cat Gang' that was fastened on the criminals."[23]

The criminals are Gewinner, Gladys, and Violet, who send messages by carrier pigeons in order to carry out their plot against The Project. Gewinner first notices the pigeons when one delivers a message to Violet, his sister-in-law. When he asks her about "the pigeon bit," she replies that she has an old school chum named Gladys who thinks that the most obvious and discreet method of exchanging messages is by carrier pigeons. This same Gladys is the girl Billy Spangler hires in his drive-in; later he is startled to see her accept a live bird from a strange man with whiskers (Gewinner in disguise). The

[22] Ibid., p. 37.

[23] Ibid., p. 70.

significance of the pigeon as a symbol of romanticism is seen in this passage from the novella:

> This message from Gladys to Gewinner, delivered at dusk by a pigeon white as a dove, gave him this bit of pleasantly romantic advice, if advice you can call it.
>
> Dear Pen Pal and Pigeon Fancier, went the message quotable at this point, it is advisable for me to remind you that the use of the term "knightly quest" instead of "nightly quest" is not just a verbal conceit but a thing of the highest significance in every part of creation, wherever a man in the prison of his body can remember his spirit. Sincerely, Gladys. Then there was a short postscript: Watch the white bird returning!
>
> Gewinner watched the white bird returning, he saw it open its snowy wings but rising straight up without moving them as if it were caught in a sudden, sweeping updraft of wind, and it disappeared in the air as if it were changed to mist.[24]

This image combines the Williamsian concepts of freedom, the spirit, the artist as he effects change, and romanticism. Romantics, Williams seems to say, are as quaint and old-fashioned, but as beautiful, as sending messages by carrier pigeon.

Even though Gewinner and the two women are successful in their plot, Williams cannot keep an indication of doom out of the satire. As the three plotters are hurrying to The Project

[24] Ibid., pp. 84-85.

with their bomb, we are told that Mrs. Pearce keeps an aviary of parakeets and lovebirds and canaries,

> all of which were now in a state of excitement and making a great commotion. Mrs. Pearce supposed that they had heard her approaching and were expressing their delight. She paid the birds two calls a day. . . and she would sit with them for a while, talking baby talk and making kissing sounds at them. They always responded to her visits with much chatter and flurry but this evening, hearing her approach, they were downright delirious.
>
> Yes, they do adore me, she remarked to herself. I'll go in there and pay them a little call to settle them down for the night. So she went on through the library into the conservatory. The first thing she noticed there was that the air was quite chilly--and no wonder, the glass doors onto the garden were wide open. Now who did that? she asked herself crossly as she went to close the doors, but before she could close them, wings flapped over her head and a pigeon flew out. . . .
>
> To the butler she added, Close the doors to the garden. Parakeets and lovebirds catch pneumonia and wake up dead overnight. Good night, birdies, sleep tight, she crooned to the aviary. . .[25]

Williams seems to be saying that those fragile souls who accept their captivity, as the lovebirds and parakeets, are doomed to be destroyed by the cold world. Happily, Gewinner and the two women do not accept their spiritual imprisonment in the town and flee like pigeons.

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 93-95.

Gewinner's quest for freedom (and whatever else he is searching for) is twice in the story associated with the image of the firefly. During the hours between midnight and dawn he drives through the streets to the athletic stadium of the high school in a quest for some homosexual liaison. When he sees the glow of another visitor's cigarette, he sits down and waits patiently. "Then he would wait a while longer, and sometimes, reluctantly, fearfully, the one who had made the firefly glow in the distance would emerge from the stands and approach the fountain."[26] These nightly prowls are marked by a ritualistic order: he dresses for the occasion, first bathing and anointing himself like a bride, then preparing himself by internal bathing, then sensuously adorning himself in sheer clothes, sheer because he likes the chill air which makes him more conscious of the "self-contained life in his body."[27] The life in his body may be suggested by the firefly's light; in any case, the firefly's glow is associated with youth and freedom from the constrictions of time in an image at the end of the satire.

[26] Ibid., p. 75.

[27] Ibid., p. 72. For a discussion of the ritualization in Williams's work see Esther Merle Jackson's chapter "The Synthetic Myth" in The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, especially pp. 55-58.

Gewinner, Gladys, and Violet are in a spaceship which is occupied by three astronauts in the full glitter of youth and where the concern with time is steadily left behind. "Sometimes a flock of stars will go past like fireflies in a child's twilight, and for a moment or two the Ark of Space will be flooded with light. . . ."[28]

Thus the novella, though lacking tightness of plot and fullness of characterization, presents a series of vivid images which present recurring concerns of the dramatist: romanticism, freedom and escape, fragmentation in a coldly industrialized and militaristic society, time, and the problems of reality and the artistic temperament. Some of the same concerns are evident in The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone.

The novel, which was entitled Moon of Pause at first draft, abounds in bird images, by far the most frequent animal images. In an excellent analysis of the bird images of this novel Albert Gérard notes

> the perfect imagic integration achieved by Mr. Williams in his first novel. With apparent ease and simplicity, the writer has managed to communicate a fairly intricate cluster of notions by his skilful use of symbolic motifs. The fate of

[28] Ibid., p. 99.

> Mrs. Stone might strike the reader as merely pathetic if he was not periodically reminded by the image of the bird of prey that her present predicament is the logical outcome of "Vaulting ambition, which o'er-leaps itself / And falls on the other." The bird is a hieroglyph which evokes a group of correlated items of meaning. In itself, it represents first ambition and then lust, and it exposes the underlying unity of both impulses; it stands for their common aggressiveness and for their destructive power, which, after operating on Mrs. Stone's environment, finally dooms her to ruin. On the other hand, the particular setting of the bird--"commanding a precipice," "on the edge of a cliff," or, in its connection with the plans, drifting in the "vacuity of air"--has its parallel in the solitude of Mrs. Stone, in her spiritual emptiness, in her precarious poise on the verge of disaster. Finally, the bird is at the centre of the basic pattern of the novel, the ironic pattern of transitory success involving failure and degradation, which appears in Mrs. Stone's career, in her marriage, and in her affair with Paolo.[29]

In all the flashbacks Mrs. Stone is likened to a bird of prey. In her career on the stage she had skillfully dominated any competition from a gifted young actor by "obliterating him in the shadow of her virtuosity as boldly as a hawk descending upon some powerless little creature of the grasses," but "it had not consciously struck her that she had behaved like a

[29]Albert Gérard, "The Eagle and the Star: Symbolic Motifs in 'The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone,'" English Studies, XXXVI (1955), 151.

great bird of plunder."[30] She had courted the favor of her professional associates to achieve success by visiting them in the hospital, but "she looked at sick people with the hard eyes of a bird," and the "bird-like opacity of her eyes" betrays her insincerity.[31] Not only has her hawklike ambition destroyed or emasculated those who would stand in her way, it has also caused her ultimate failure in the role of Juliet. Presumably an artist, she has been driven by self-assertion, not self-expression. "She was prompted," writes Gérard, "by 'the spur of competitive ambition,' not by any urgent need to express herself with the means of her art. . . .Her aim was not so much to give the best performances possible, but to reach the top of her profession. . . ."[32] Her success was dependent solely upon her ambition, and so, ironically, is her failure. Ambition took her to the top, but because she has excluded human values in her flight to success, because of her emotional coldness and egoism, she is made unfit to play the

[30]Tennessee Williams, The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone (New York: New Directions, 1950), pp. 84-85.

[31]Ibid., p. 104.

[32]Gérard, p. 149.

part of Juliet: her talent is "lifeless" and "mechanical." She is isolated and bereft of warmth, with "nothing to do but drift about the emptiness of the rooms."

> The drift!
> Going into a room and drifting out of a room because there was no real purpose in going in, nor any more purpose in going back out again. That was the drift. The drift was everything that you did without having a reason. . . .For a long, long time there seemed to have been that nothingness which had started when the pearls broke from their string in her performance as Juliet and she clawed at a hand that tried to restrain her and then rushed out to resume the act of destruction on the stage that was flooded with very thin blue light like a wrapping of tissue paper through which she clawed with the talons of a chained bird.[33]

In a photograph taken at a dress rehearsal before the disastrous performance as Juliet, Mrs. Stone had observed "something hawk-like" in the expression of her face. But after the failure (to which, in her egoism, Mrs. Stone over-reacts), the clarity of her mind, so necessary to a bird of prey, had dimmed. She had committed parts to memory with phenomenal rapidity; she was said to function from the head rather than the heart. But now, in the drift, "that great clarity of mind on which she prided herself was momentarily disturbed and clouded, as if an aquatic

[33]Williams, The Roman Spring, pp. 19-20.

monster had risen from the depths of an opaque sea without quite breaking the surface. . . ."[34] Her clear mind was like a destructive bird, but now "her head was remarkably quiet as if a savage bird had been locked in it which had now flown out through some invisible opening."[35] Gérard notes that at this point in her life, when she is in Rome, there is a significant shift in the bird imagery. She becomes sexually free of any danger from childbearing since she is made infertile through menopause, and Count Paolo notes that "in spite of her skill as an actress, the violet eyes of Mrs. Stone had betrayed her. There was a rapacious bird in them that he could release from confinement, and not to the clouds."[36] Gérard says,

> As the eagle of ambition had dominated her career as an actress, first ensuring her success, then causing her final failure, so now the rapacious bird of purely physical desire takes over, and after giving her the pleasure she is hankering after, will precipitate her final decay. The story traces the successive steps of Mrs. Stone's degradation: her realization of the true nature of her longings, her yielding to Paolo's entreaties, her paying him for it and her gradual abandonment of all dignity until she finally throws her keys to the young man who has been following her through the streets of Rome. . . .It is a measure of

[34] Ibid., p. 22.

[35] Ibid., p. 19.

[36] Ibid., p. 36.

> her degradation that, at the end of the novel, after she has invited her perverse suitor to her rooms, she is proud of what she has done, because it gives a meaning, however base and unworthy, to her otherwise empty life.[37]

She is using sex, as she has used it, or rather misused it, earlier in her life, to put meaning in her life, but her affair with Paolo will fail just as her earlier attempts in the realm of sex have been failures. Her marriage to an "Easter bunny" of a man has been to avoid copulation; it would have ended disastrously if he had not broken down and wept, transferring himself to a dependent. Thus their marriage, though it seems successful, is essentially a perversion; it is clearly sterile and barren. The marriage is the basic pattern of the novel, writes Gérard, "a deeply ironic pattern of transitory, illusory, superficial success containing the germ of, and followed by, failure in essentials."[38] She uses her husband--not only to avoid motherhood, but also as a pretext for leaving the stage. She also uses his bad health as a pretext for going on the trip to Europe, against the doctor's advice. It is on the plane to Athens that Mr. Stone dies, a victim of the hawk. The plane, carrying the lifeless body of Mr. Stone, is

[37]Gérard, pp. 150-51.

[38]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 149.

described as an "incredibly soaring but lifeless bird," and a "mechanical bird."[39] As Mrs. Stone beats "her wing-like arms on the pane of glass" in the plane crying "Island, island,"[40] we can see that the plane is representative of Mrs. Stone's own character, lifeless and mechanical. Now she is completely alone and barren, like the island where they cannot land. She remains isolated when she reaches Rome, her apartment standing "like the solitary eyrie of a bird above the roofs of the city."[41] The lone bird on a high promontory suggests Mrs. Stone in an earlier image as well; she turns her collar up to her cheekbones, "but out of that insufficiently flattering shadow her frightened and aging face had the look of an embattled hawk peering from the edge of a cliff in the storm."[42] Similarly, Mrs. Stone is first seen in the novel through the eyes of the exhibitionist to whom she surrenders in the end; as she appears on the terrace with her friend Meg Bishop: the two women are wearing dark furs,

[39]Williams, The Roman Spring, p. 89.

[40]Ibid., p. 91.

[41]Ibid., p. 43.

[42]Ibid., p. 11.

> and the collars of these fur coats were turned up about their faces so that from this distance below them they gave an impression of being two exotic giant birds that were commanding a precipice. The young man watched them as anxiously as if they were birds of a predatory nature, likely at any moment to swoop down upon him and gather him up in their talons.[43]

Gérard notes that although the connotations of the two previous images are the same (danger, "precipice," "edge of a cliff"; fear, "anxiously," "frightened"; the ominous suggestion of imminent and destructive action, "embattled," "likely at any moment to swoop down"), there is a subtle difference. In one Mrs. Stone is frightened; in the other, it is the observer who is frightened. The image, then, is ambivalent: Mrs. Stone is both destructive and threatened with destruction. "This significant ambivalence," says Gérard, "is again the distinguishing feature of the comparison when it re-appears in a conversation between Karen Stone and Meg Bishop."[44] He suggests that this conversation clarifies some of the ambiguity of the simile. They are discussing Mrs. Stone's failure in the part of Juliet:

[43] Ibid., p. 6.

[44] Gérard, pp. 147-48.

> When the violins played and that precious little Romeo came slithering under your balcony, I felt like shouting to him, Watch out, little bird, she'll snatch you up in her claws and tear you to pieces!
>
> You mean I looked like a vulture?
>
> No, an imperial eagle!
>
> Perhaps, said Mrs. Stone, that accounts for my failure in the part. . .[45]

Though Meg Bishop has been struck only by the destructive power of the actress, Mrs. Stone recognizes that that quality in her which can be compared to a bird of prey is also self-destroying. (This ambiguity is also suggested by the title of the book's first section--"A Cold Sun.") Throughout her stay in Rome, she continues to be described as a bird of prey, but in ever-lessening degrees: when Paolo is described as a whore, the two sharp notes of her laugh "might have come from the attacking beak of a bird;"[46] when he bends down to kiss her, "her arms and her head had risen as if the moon on the water had turned to a bird that sprang skyward;"[47] when he insults her, she "rushed past him with the rapidity of a great-winged bird. . . ."[48] Williams writes that "her body had flown like

[45] Williams, The Roman Spring, pp. 13-14.

[46] Ibid., p. 59.

[47] Ibid., p. 64.

[48] Ibid., p. 143.

a powerful bird through and above the entangling branches of the past few years, but her face now exhibited the record of the flight."[49] Ironically, it is the weak Roman gigolos such as Paolo and the exhibitionist who finally undo her completely. As she loses her dignity, the only thing of worth she was holding on to, she finds herself searching for Paolo along the streets, "as a lost dog goes out sniffing after its absent owner."[50] The other women Paolo has serviced are described as monkeys by the Contessa, Paolo's procurer. The monkey reference shows her contempt and their foolishness. Such women are described as wolves by Paolo himself: Mrs. Stone's feeling for him, he says, is romantic, not wolfish; the other women "were at me like wolves almost from the moment I met them, yes, they were a wolf pack."[51] The irony is that she is just as ravenous as the other women and she allows herself to be made a monkey out of by such weak characters. Paolo's essence, which Mrs. Stone considers a puff of meringue, is in his sensuous visits to Renato the barber; he goes "to give

[49] Ibid., p. 115.

[50] Ibid., p. 39.

[51] Ibid., pp. 48-49.

a spine of significance to his butterfly existence."[52] His brief, fragile being is centered in his groin, writes Williams, and the knees of his legs "flopped indolently apart like the wings of a tired butterfly."[53] The same image, with the same sexual connotations, appeared in an earlier poem, "The Legend." His partner, the Contessa, is equally contemptible, and is also described with insect images. She feels her lips quivering in gossip "as the drunken wings of an insect above a nourishing flower. As she whispered on, the Roman ladies fluttered greedily toward her, all feeding upon the same intoxicating nectar."[54] Like Mrs. Stone, she uses people to achieve her ends. She is using Paolo to support her, and she uses a young American film-actress to patch up the quarrel between herself and Paolo: "She had used the film-actress as a bait, like a lump of sugar to coax a fettlesome pony back into a stable."[55] Yet these grasping characters accuse Mrs. Stone of materialism. Paolo tells her that he was a leader of a flying club called

[52] Ibid., p. 26.

[53] Ibid., p. 126.

[54] Ibid., pp. 134-35.

[55] Ibid., p. 133.

the Doves during the war (a week earlier he had said he led a tank outfit called the Tigers); in an angry outburst at her laughter he says,"It is ridiculous of me to talk about my doves to someone who is interested only in the golden excrement of the American eagle."[56] In an effort of composure, Mrs. Stone says,"Speaking of birds, is it true that the rondini don't have legs and that is why they stay in the air all the time? No, said Paolo, they stay in the air because they don't want to mix with American tourists."[57] Mrs. Stone has already been linked with the imperial eagle; here is a suggestion that many of Mrs. Stone's shortcomings are also those of America: competitiveness, sterility, and spiritual emptiness. Yet Williams does not let Europe escape the same judgment; his Italian characters are wholly contemptible. Paolo is even more interested in the American eagle's golden excrement, and the Contessa is dependent for her existence upon it. Rome, like Mrs. Stone, has decayed from its former glory: "the crumbling golden antiquity of the city beneath her and the aging, frightened face of the woman beside her spelt the same

[56] Ibid., p. 70.

[57] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

abominable word to Miss Bishop, and that was corruption."[58] The sky of Rome is closed and low; like the Italian characters, it is described with insect images:

> Those tiny swifts the Romans call rondini had now returned to the city. During the day they hovered invisibly high toward the sun but at dusk they lowered a quivering net to the height of Mrs. Stone's terrace. To Mrs. Stone the city itself appeared to be performing some leisurely trick of levitation. Each spring morning when she came out on her terrace, the intricately-woven and gold-dusted web of the streets in which the domed churches stood like weaving spiders, seemed to have lost more gravity. . . . Sometimes it lightened her heart to look down on it, but that was only momentarily, and the longer and more consistent effect was a feeling of apprehension. . . .[59]

Mrs. Stone has dual emotions, as symbolized by the rondini, which at first seem to reach to the sun, the source of life, with a beautiful freedom but which in reality lower an imprisoning net over the aging actress. She is caught in her own ambition and lust, doomed, as is the whole of civilization (if we may read that into Williams's use of the city of Rome as a symbol), to corruption. She has prostituted her vocation as an artist to fame, her sexuality to sterility and degradation.

[58] Ibid., p. 16. Gerard comments that this judgment coming from the fake, empty character of Meg Bishop indicates the emergence of a satiric strain in the ironic texture of the story (see Gerard, p. 153)

[59] Ibid., pp. 64-65.

V. ANIMAL IMAGES IN WILLIAMS'S SHORTER PLAYS

Nancy Tischler has called the one-act play form a natural one for Tennessee Williams because "it conceals his plot weakness and, on the other hand, highlights his genius for creating character through realistic dialogue."[1] The dramatic form keeps his tendency to over-poetize and philosophize in check. His use of imagery is more integrated in his dramatic works. His concept of the theater as a "plastic medium" enables him to convey images through stage devices rather than mere words.[2] This chapter will explore the animal imagery in the plays found in three volumes of collected short plays of Williams, American Blues, Twenty-Seven Wagons Full of Cotton, and Dragon Country; and in seven other plays: "Baby Doll," "Small Craft Warnings" "The Kingdom of Earth," "The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore," "The Demolition Downtown," "Period of Adjustment," and "Suddenly Last Summer."

The early plays of American Blues won for Tennessee Williams a contest prize and mark the beginning of his career as a

[1]Nancy Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan (New York: Citadel Press, 1961), p. 68.

[2]See Tennessee Williams, "The History of a Play," Pharos, 1-2 (1945), p. 110.

dramatist. "Moony's Kid Don't Cry" is about a young-workman husband who yearns to escape the restrictions of cheap living and a monotonous job and return to the free woodman's life in Ontario. Moony has spent the last of their money on an extravagant hobby-horse for his one-month-old baby; it is a symbol of freedom to Moony. Williams writes this about the set:

> By far the most striking and attractive article in the room is a brand-new hobby-horse that stands stage Center. There is something very gallant, almost exciting, about this new toy. It is chestnut brown, with a long flowing mane, fine golden nostrils and scarlet upcurled lips. It looks like the very spirit of unlimited freedom and fearless assault.[3]

When Moony and his wife Jane argue about his being trapped into the marriage and about the cost of the horse, the audience discovers what the toy means to Moony:

> MOONY: I lied to you, Jane. I paid ten-fifty for that little horse.
> JANE: (*Aghast.*) Ten-fifty? You--you--No, it's not possible--even *you* couldn't--
> MOONY: It was worth more than that!
> JANE: Worth more? More?! Worth--! (*She is breathless.*)
> MOONY: Sure it was!. . . .
> Aw, he'll grow up to it, Jane. (*He is a little abashed.*) I had one o' these things when I was a kid.

[3]Tennessee Williams, "Moony's Kid Don't Cry," *American Blues* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1948), p. 5.

> JANE: You musta got thrown off it an' landed on your head!
> MOONY: Naw, Dad got drunk one Saturday night, an' bought me one at a junk-shop. Mother, she felt like you did. . . .But me, I was nuts about it. Him an' me, both, we got on the horse--him in back, me in front--an' sang "Ride a Cock-horse to Danbury Cross."[4]

A few lines later we learn that Moony's father had abandoned the family, and Moony thinks he was smart to do so. Both Moony and Jane are caught like animals in a trap. Jane calls Moony a clumsy ox, and when he half-jokingly says he'd like to take his axe and swing through the wall, she says, "Moony: Why didn't I marry an ape an' go live in the zoo?"[5] Later Moony says the apes down at the plant think he is nuts because he has original ideas. As the couple get deeper into their fight, Moony calls Jane a "skinny yellow cat," she strikes him, and he becomes "like a mad animal,"[6] roaring, lunging forward, and clutching Jane by the throat. All these images serve to detail their trapped existence, their instinctive behavior towards each other, and their physical strength. After he decides to leave and picks up his axe, his "eyes

[4]Ibid., p. 12.

[5]Ibid., p. 6.

[6]Ibid., pp. 12-13.

glow triumphantly to life. He looks again at Jane like an escaped animal at a cage. She does not move. She stares at him with hurt animal eyes" and later crawls toward him "like a half-crushed animal."[7] Just as he is about to walk out, she shoves his infant son at him and tells him to take the baby with him--"You'll have a swell time singing 'Ride a Cock-horse' together!"[8] Moony becomes absorbed in the baby, showing him the hobby-horse as the curtain falls. The play is a forceful and honest account of the anger and frustration of every new parent, symbolized with artful images.

In "The Case of the Crushed Petunias" Miss Dorothy Simple is the stereotyped Boston spinster who keeps a canary. The canary, which cheeps timidly, then tries an arpeggio and is silenced, and cheeps inquiringly at the young man who comes into Miss Simple's Notion Shop, represents the spinster's plight in her own society--alone, trapped, she would sing but is silenced by social values. The young man tells her,"You are living alone with your canary and beginning to dislike it." She protests that she loves her canary, but he replies,

[7]Ibid., p. 13.

[8]Ibid., p. 14.

"Secretly, Miss Simple, you wish the bird-seed would choke it!"[9] In a delightful poem, the young man says that the rigid petunias of this world "mark with sharp and moral eye / phenomena that pass them by / And classify as good or evil / mammoth whale or tiny weevil. / . . . All honest language shocks them so / they cringe to hear a rooster crow. . . ."[10] Signi Falk calls this play "a trial flight, an early effort to make symbols do the work of extensive dialogue."[11] Williams uses the canary, whale, weevil, and rooster to represent his values of artistic freedom and desire for acceptance of truth rather than judgments about it.

"The Long Stay Cut Short, or The Unsatisfactory Supper" was reworked and combined with "Twenty-Seven Wagons Full of Cotton" to make the motion picture Baby Doll. The characters Baby Doll and Archie Lee are unsympathetic and speak in clichés. Archie Lee wants to get rid of Aunt Rose, who is the pathetic old maid aunt who has been used by all the relatives and discarded because none of them wants the responsibility and

[9]Williams, "The Case of the Crushed Petunias," American Blues, pp. 24-25.

[10]Ibid., p. 25.

[11]Falk, p. 47.

expense of her last illness and funeral. He says he is nominated the goat to bear the expenses, and that the price of morphine is "just as high as a cat's back."[12] He can't get any money from the other relatives because they're as tight as drums, "they squeeze ev'ry nickel until th' buffalo bleeds!"[13] He's tired of pussy-footing around, and wants to put Aunt Rose out immediately, but Baby Doll says that Aunt Rose is "just as obstinate as a mule."[14] These clichés about animals serve to characterize Archie Lee and Baby Doll and add humor to the dialogue. In contrast to these almost comic characters who utter clichés is Aunt Rose, a tragic figure, described as "the type of old lady, about eighty-five years old, that resembles a delicate white-headed monkey."[15] The monkey image seems to describe her appearance rather than having any symbolic value. Williams sets a mood of grotesque lyricism by his use of music and by the symbol of the wind, which has a cat-like whine at the beginning of the play. At the end,

[12]Williams, "The Unsatisfactory Supper," American Blues, p. 38.

[13]Ibid., p. 39.

[14]Ibid., p. 34.

[15]Ibid., p. 35.

"the music is drowned out by the cat-like whine of the wind turning suddenly angry" and "the whine of the angry cat turns into a distant roar and the roar approaches"[16] to blow Aunt Rose away.

The last play in this volume, "Ten Blocks on the Camino Real," is an early sketch of Camino Real, Williams's personal statement about man's journey in an unfriendly world. A carrion-bird perches on a crumbling yellow arch over a steep alley which leads to the way out to sterile landscape. Tischler calls Camino Real a summation of Williams's creed. "Any hope for redemption from the world of the Camino Real lies, Williams says, in the violets' breaking through the rocks. Beauty, imagination, and love must triumph over cruelty, ugliness, and fascism. The soft can win out over the fierce."[17] This shorter version ends with the violets in the mountains breaking up the rocks, but earlier in the play the same violets are spoken of:

> MARGUERITE: . . .Yes, we've grown used to each other, and that's what passes for love at this far, moonlit end of the Camino Real.
> JACQUES: The sort of violets--that can grow on the moon?
> MARGUERITE: Or in the crevices of those far-away

[16] Ibid., pp. 41-42.

[17] Tischler, p. 190.

> mountains, among the crevices--fertilized by the droppings of carrion-birds. . . .We're used to each other. . .[18]

So even though love does break through the sterile rocks in the end, it is not real love, but merely what passes for love, a love fertilized by vicious greed or lust as symbolized by the vultures. Two main aspects of the Camino Real, the world of illusion and the world of lust, are seen here. Both ideas are supported by further animal imagery. Jacques describes his lust as wolfish: "I was a wolf. To be a wolf is to be the victim of an emotional impotence, and I have been one of the most insatiable wolves on record. . . ."[19] In reality, however, he and Kilroy, a champion boxer who has a bad heart, are "like a pair of timid old maids at the sound of a mouse in the woodwork!"[20] This attitude is further displayed when Kilroy says he would not hurt a fly unless it had on leather mittens;[21] ironically, he has hurt his wife deeply by failing to share

[18]Tennessee Williams, "Ten Blocks on the Camino Real," American Blues, p. 54.

[19]Ibid., p. 70.

[20]Ibid., p. 71.

[21]Ibid., p. 65.

his anguish and misfortune at his bad health with her. Instead of telling her goodbye, he just left and wrote her a note. The world of the gypsy and her daughter is one of complete illusion. The gypsy's daughter, Esmeralda, wears a pair of glittering emerald snakes upon her breasts; Kilroy asks her why she wears them, and she answers, "Supposedly for protection--but, really, for fun!"[22] The snakes, then, represent illusion and deceit, much as the traditional evil deception of the serpent in Eden. The gypsy makes a big deal out of Esmeralda's purity, when in reality she is a whore. Esmeralda herself lives in a dream world; she says that "some girls see themselves in silver foxes. I only see myself in Acapulco!" and she grabs Kilroy's hand and purrs like a cat.[23] The cat image reappears when her mother returns to find that Kilroy has lifted her veil and says,"Ohhhh! The pussy will play while the old mother cat is away?"[24] Her indignation here is deceitful; the veil lifting is what she actually expected and was even paid for. The world of the Camino Real is where "the

[22]Ibid., pp. 63-64.

[23]Ibid., p. 65.

[24]Ibid., p. 68.

girls in the Panama clip-joints are drinking Blue Moons, and gobs and the seagoing bell-hops are getting stewed, screwed and tattooed, and the S. P.'s are busy as cats on a hot tin-roof!"[25] It is also where people can make like "canaries in bed-springs,[26] Williams's apt term for a creaking bed during sexual intercourse. The figures on the street, though they murmur almost wordlessly among themselves with the weary sound of pigeons, seemingly harmless, have enough lust and greed in them to find the energy to rob Kilroy, who calls them "Leeches! Zopilotes! Snakes!"[27] Even the walls of the Siete Mares Hotel offer the illusion of freedom with their turquoise figures of free, leaping dolphins, star-fish, and conch-shells.[28] Much more frank is the sign over the pawn shop, The Loan Shark. In spite of all the rapacity and deception on the Camino Real, however, the play ends on a hopeful note. The madrecita, a

[25]Ibid., p. 50.

[26]Ibid. There is obvious sexual meaning in all of these images. Another example of the illusion on the Camino Real is the homosexual Baron, whom Kilroy calls "a normal American in a clean white suit." In reality, says the Baron, "My suit is pale yellow, my nationality is French and I am not at all normal " (pp. 55-56).

[27]Ibid., p. 49.

[28]Ibid., p. 44.

figure of love and sympathy, touches the dead Kilroy's forehead with her flowers and says, "Rise, ghost! Go, bird!"[29] and he is resurrected to join Don Quixote in his travels. In the dignity of the characters of Quixote, Kilroy, Marguerite, and Jacques, it seems, lies the hope of a way out of the Camino Real. The way out, however, may be just as illusory as the Camino itself.

The problems of the romantic character in the world of realists is detailed in several plays from the volume Twenty-Seven Wagons Full of Cotton. In "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion" we find a male writer and dyed blonde woman of forty, Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore, who is much like the artist of "The Angel in the Alcove" in her aversion to roaches. She complains to her landlady, Mrs. Wire, a tough realist, about the pests. Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore is living in a world of illusion; she says she owns a Brazilian rubber plantation and will come into money soon. An early Blanche DuBois, she pretends a certain fastidiousness, but in reality she uses Larkspur Lotion, which Williams notes is used to treat body vermin.[30] The writer, too, makes up his

[29]Ibid., p. 73.

[30]Tennessee Williams, "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion," Twenty-Seven Wagons Full of Cotton (New York: New Directions, 1953), p. 63.

own illusion about a 780-page masterpiece in order to tolerate the real world of lice-infested mattresses and roach-infested rooms. Their reality, it may be noted, is more horrible than ordinary reality, as symbolized by the cockroaches. The roaches are not the ordinary, pedestrian kind, but flying cockroaches, "something I never dreamed to be in existence," says Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore.[31] Similarly, Williams's horrors are never ordinary, but almost fantastic.

Miss Lucretia Collins of "Portrait of a Madonna" is the same type as Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore, hanging on to the last vestiges of an earlier, more graceful civilization as it collapses under her. The porter, who is sympathetic to her plight, says that "she's proud as a peacock's tail in spite of 'er awful appearance."[32] The peacock image not only suggests her pride, but also an earlier, romantic period. Like Blanche, Miss Collins is taken away to an asylum at the end of this piece.

Another character left alone and seeking refuge in make-believe is the thirteen-year-old girl Willie of "This Property

[31] Ibid., p. 66.

[32] Williams, "Portrait of a Madonna," Twenty-Seven Wagons, p. 91.

Is Condemned." Esther Merle Jackson sees this play as an example of Williams's "conventional pattern of articulating a key image."[33] He creates a dream world, an image after the manner of the surrealist painters:

> SCENE: A railroad embankment on the outskirts of a small Mississippi town on one of those milky white winter mornings. . . .Behind the low embankment of the tracks is a large yellow frame house which has a look of tragic vacancy. . . .The land is utterly flat. . . .The sky is a great milky whiteness: crows occasionally make a sound of roughly torn cloth.[34]

He selects several specific fragments and synthesizes them in a montage to present the world of his play. Jackson writes that

> It is clear that this world of the play is a carefully devised reconstruction of poetic vision. The playwright is concerned with the evocation of a single image. In the twenty minutes or so which make up the playing time, only one other character appears. When the child departs from the stage, no event has taken place, no changes have been made in her life, no information has been given which was not evident upon her appearance. The play exists only to reveal to the spectator a vision of the distorted world in which the child lives. Each element in the scene has been chosen for its symbolic value. The railroad

[33]Esther Merle Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 37.

[34]Williams, "This Property Is Condemned," Twenty-Seven Wagons, p. 197.

> embankment, with its bare trees and singing crows, is as bereft of humanity as the child--a dilapidated doll.[35]

All the images, even the crow, represent death. Willie is keenly aware of death, since her older sister Alva died. Like Alva, whose beaux ran out on her "like rats from a sinking ship,"[36] Willie has been abandoned. Any comfort to be found will have to come from within herself. When she skins her knee, symbolic of her psychic wounds, Tom tells her to spit on it to take the sting away: "That's animal's medicine, you know. They always lick their wounds."[37] Each image, then, contributes to the overall picture of Willie as lonely, abandoned, and wounded in a distorted, hurtful world.

In "Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen" two people like the couple in "The Vine" appear; like Willie, they have "ravaged young faces like the faces of children in a famished country. In their speech there is a sort of politeness, a

[35]Jackson, p. 38.

[36]Williams, "This Property is Condemned," Twenty-Seven Wagons, p. 202.

[37]Ibid., p. 198.

sort of tender formality like that of two lonely children who want to be friends."[38] The scene is punctuated by the rain and "the drumming flight of pigeons past the window"[39] which come and go during the play. Once the woman gasps as the pigeons sweep past the window, and she herself takes jerky sips from a glass "like a bird drinking."[40] Like the birds, she is easily startled; but she longs to escape the world by being blown thinner and thinner "And thinner and thinner and thinner and thinner!--Till finally I won't have any body at all, and the wind picks me up in its cool white arms forever, and takes me away!"[41] This escape--how similar to the fate of Aunt Rose--would be a withdrawal from the world by taking a made-up name and immersing herself in the lives of imaginary people in books and movies; the escape into nonentity is suggested by the complementary images of wind, rain, and pigeons.

Another escape, this time from his own past, is that of the young writer of "The Long Goodbye." Williams describes the writer's room: "The furnishings are disheveled and old

[38]Williams, "Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen," Twenty-Seven Wagons, p. 211.

[39]Ibid., p. 212.

[40]Ibid., p. 211.

[41]Ibid., p. 218.

as if they had witnessed the sudden withdrawal of twenty-five years of furious, desperate living among them."[42] The past, indicated by the voices of children playing "Fly, sheepie, fly" and "Olly-olly-oxen-free," is full of painful memories to the writer Joe. He wants to leave it behind and forget it, but it is not as easy to get rid of as the body of the dead goldfish in his room:

> JOE: No. I'm not gonna stay here. All of this here is dead for me. The goldfish is dead. I forgot to feed it. . . .
> I shouldn't have left the bowl setting right here in the sun. It probably cooked the poor bastard. [After his friend Silva dumps the fish in the toilet] Why is it that Jesus makes a distinction between the goldfish an' the sparrow! (He laughs.) There is no respect for dead bodies.
> SILVA: (coming back in) You are losing your social consciousness, Joe. You should say "unless they are rich"! I read about once where a millionaire buried his dead canary in a small golden casket studded with genuine diamonds. I think it presents a beautiful picture. The saffron feathers on the white satin and the millionaire's tears falling like diamonds in sunlight--maybe a boy's choir singing! Like death in the movies. Which is always a beautiful thing. . . .[43]

The illusory death as presented in the movies is in ironic

[42]Williams, "The Long Goodbye," Twenty-Seven Wagons, p. 161.

[43]Ibid., p. 163.

contrast to the real death suffered by Joe's mother. His mother, who had longed for a place in the country with a hen-house to escape from the city life, comes to Joe in memory and speaks of death as

> being let out of a box. And going upwards, not down. . . .There's freedom, Joe, and freedom's the big thing in life. It's funny that some of us don't ever get it until we're dead. . . .[44]

Joe also remembers his sister Myra, whose zest for night life is presented in filthy animal imagery. She says that she wants to go places, have fun, "but I don't want things like him crawling on me, worse than filthy cockroaches!"[45] But as she becomes a prostitute, Joe tells her she's "going down the toboggan like a greased pig."[46] The dreamlike memories of Joe are in ironic counterpoint to the sounds of movers busily taking the furniture away. (When they break a mirror and Silva comments seven years' bad luck, Joe says the stork must have dropped us through a whole bunch of them mirrors when we were born;[47] the movers say things like "quit horsin' around

[44] Ibid., p. 171.

[45] Ibid., p. 174.

[46] Ibid., p. 176.

[47] Ibid., p. 168.

on a job" and "he couldn't hit an elephant's ass" as Williams attempts realistic dialogue.)

"The Last of My Solid Gold Watches" is another look at the past. "Mistah Charlie" Colton--who has fifteen watch chains over his huge expanse of chest and belly, each chain attached to a gold watch, each watch awarded him as ranking salesman of the year for his shoe company--deplores the changes he has lived to see. He sees himself, and the qualities he represents, as outdated, "one of them monsters you see reproduced in museums--out of the dark old ages--the giant rep-tiles, and the dino-whatever-you-call-ems. BUT--I do know this! And I state it without any shame! Initiative--self-reliance--independence of character! The old sterling qualities that distinguished one man from another--. . .are--. . .Gone with the roses of yesterday!"[48] This image, similar to that of the unicorn in The Glass Menagerie and the longhorn of Period of Adjustment, represents the unexplained extinction of a greatness in the past. This "old war-horse," who has received the last of his watches, represents the vitality, good craftsmanship, and the good manners of the South. As he tries to explain the old

[48]Tennessee Williams, "The Last of My Solid Gold Watches," Twenty-Seven Wagons, p. 83.

traditions to the indifferent, bad-mannered "young pecker-wood" Bob Harper, he describes a world which has decayed; standards and craftsmanship have given way to cheapness, flashy appearance, and commercialism. The contrast between the old drummer and the indolent "young squirrel" is a comment not only on the South but also on the Williamsian world as a whole.

"Lord Byron's Love Letter," "Hello from Bertha," and "Auto-Da-Fe" have very brief references to animals. In "Lord Byron's Love Letter" two impoverished southern gentlewomen are contrasted with a commonplace tourist couple from Milwaukee. Mrs. Tutwiler, the matronly tourist, has a stuffed bird on her hat; the two New Orleans women have a stuffed canary in a tiny pink and ivory cage. Both birds represent the pomposity and mendacity of their lives. In "Hello from Bertha," about an aging prostitute in the last stages of mental and physical decay, the characters talk in clichés: Bertha calls Goldie, the landlady, a "hell-cat" and an "old horse" and accuses her of monkeying around with her money. In "Auto-Da-Fe" appears again the theme of purification by burning. The mother is a fanatic about cleanliness and personal hygiene--"eat like a human being

and not like a dog"[49]--and the neurotic son seeks to purge himself and the area around him by setting fire to the house, as if to make retribution for their guilt.

The theme of purification of guilt appears again in the only play Williams has written in verse, "The Purification." Since the drama is about sexual indulgence, incest, and frigidity, most of the imagery is of goats, horses, foxes, and birds. The play unfolds the truth gradually, through confessions of the main characters, a technique Williams has used frequently since the writing of this play. The Judge observes that an evil thing has occurred and that the country is parched from the lack of rain. Not only is rain needed for the land, but also truth--which Williams compares to rain--is needed for men's spirits as a kind of purification. When the Judge asks for truth, Rosalio, the poet-figure son, speaks of his frustration in giving concrete form to vision. How does one reveal absolute truth?

> SON: The truth?
> Why ask me for that?
> Ask it of him, the player--
> for truth is sometimes alluded to in music.

[49]Tennessee Williams, "Auto-Da-Fe," Twenty-Seven Wagons, p. 113. This lines reminds one of Amanda of The Glass Menagerie.

> But words are too loosely woven to catch it in. . .
> A bird can be snared as it rises
> or torn to earth by the falcon.
> His song, which is truth,
> is not to be captured ever.
> It is an image, a dream,
> it is the link to the mother,
> the belly's rope that dropped our bodies from God
> a longer time ago than we remember![50]

As he continues describing the bird's song, it becomes obvious that the truth he is referring to is the passionate incest between him and his sister Elena; and the bird becomes a symbol of Elena herself:

> She's lost,
> Snared as she rose,
> or torn to earth by the falcon!
> No, she's lost,
> Irretrievably lost,
> Gone out among Spanish-named ranges. . .
> Too far to pursue
> except on the back of that lizard. . .
> . . .Whose green phosphorescence,
> scimitar-like,

[50]Tennessee Williams, "The Purification," Twenty-Seven Wagons, p. 40. Later in the play the Judge says, "I know that truth / evades the certain statement / but gradually and obliquely filters through / the mind's unfettering in sleep and dream. / The stammered cry gives more of truth than the hand / could put on passionless paper. . ." This seems to be Williams's statement about his own art--and his own struggle to present reality through drama. See chapter seven.

disturbs midnight
with hissing, metallic sky-prowling. . .[51]

The images suggest that Elena has been destroyed--in fact, she was murdered--and she can no longer be found except on the back of the lizard, an image which is explained in a later passage:

> SON: [to the Rancher] Fill up the tin buckets
> with chalky white fluid, the milk
> of that phosphorescent green lizard--
> Memory, passion. . .
> Unsatisfied old appetites--
> And stir these together--
> carefully, not to slop over--. . .
> For often toward daybreak that rime
> of the reptile's diamond-like progress. . .
> . . .makes following easy
> for those who desire to pursue him.
> He depends on his tail's rapid motion,
> scimitar-like--green lightning--
> to stave off hunters.[52]

The lizard, then, represents memory, passion, and unsatisfied old appetites--which, Williams suggests by linking them with a reptile, are not good but in fact lead to the destruction of three lives. The passion and memory belong to both of the men, Rosalio and the Rancher, and both remember Elena as they

[51] Ibid., pp. 41-42.

[52] Ibid., p. 47.

knew her--the brother remembers a pure, wild ethereal creature, the Rancher husband a sterile, deceptive fountain. The theme of deception appears to contrast with the idea of truth as stated by the Judge and by Rosalio. Elena had seemed to be pure and flowing freely like a fountain, but to her husband she was a "make-believe fountain."[53] The Indian servant Luisa, who is loyal to the Rancher, suggests the deception in Elena with these lines:

> You have heard the dead lady compared to mountain water.
> A very good comparison, I think.
> I once led goats through the mountains:
> we stopped to drink.
> It seemed the purest of fountains.
> Five of the goat herd died. . .
> The water was crystal--but it was fouled at the source.
> The water was--tainted water![54]

Here Williams uses a stock sexual symbol, the goat, to add a layer of meaning to the passage. Much of the bird imagery, as mentioned before, is sexual in nature. Rosalio, in speaking of his love for his sister, says:

> Resistless it was,
> this coming of birds together

[53] Ibid., pp. 51, 53.

[54] Ibid., p. 36.

> in heaven's center. . .
> Plumage--song--the dizzy spirals of flight
> all suddenly forced together
> in one brief, burning conjunction!
> Oh--oh--
> a passionate little spasm of wings and throats
> that clutched--and uttered--darkness. . .
> And so did the wind take back the startling pony--
> and hurl him down arroyos toward the dawn![55]

The freedom and wild abandon of the brother and sister (and perhaps their madness) is implicit in the image of the horse. Luisa is the first to mention the horse:

> The youth's demented. That's true.
> He used to ride his pony past our place. . . .
> He rode at night, bare-back. . . .
> He pastured his pony some nights at Casa Rojo
> His visits were unannounced except by the pony's
> neighing in the distance, borne down windward.[56]

Next, the mother suggests that the madness might be inherited: "I also rode on horseback through the mountains / in August as well as in March-- / I also shouted and made ridiculous gestures / before I grew older and learned the uselessness of it. . . ."[57] Finally the brother mentions the horse,

[55] Ibid., p. 45.

[56] Ibid., p. 37.

[57] Ibid., p. 39.

indicating sexual passion as well as freedom and linking the horse with the wind:

> O stallion lover
> the night is your raped white mare!
> The meadow grasses continued entirely too far
> beyond where the gate--is broken in several places.
> Cling to it, dark child,
> till it carries you further than ever.
> O make it swing out
> to the wildest and openest places!. . .
> Peeto, our pony,
> catches the scent in his nostrils
> of thunderstorms coming. . . .
> When Peeto was born
> he stood on his four legs at once, and accepted the world.
> He was wiser than I.
> When Peeto was one year old,
> he was wiser than God!. . .
> Peeto! Peeto!
> The Indian boys call after. . .
> . . .trying to stop him,
> trying to stop--the wind. . .[58]

Rosalio and Elena had gone past the boundaries of civilization to the wildest and openest meadows when they indulged their passions in their incestuous relationship. Yet, says Rosalio, that love was beautiful and free. On the other hand, Luisa, the Rancher's kitchen servant, considers their union demonic. She says that Rosalio's tongue should be torn from his mouth and flung to buzzards[59] and that on the wild August nights

[58] Ibid., pp. 59-60.

[59] Ibid., p. 44.

when the brother and sister meet "the dogs go howling like demons about the ranches."[60] The incest has led to murder, and the evil has caused drought and plague for the entire community, Williams seems to say. On the day of the murder "The day was still. / Oppressively still. / Noon--breathless. The sky was vacant. / White--plague-like--exhausted. / Once it disgorged a turbulent swarm of locusts. . . ."[61] The locusts are still plaguing the countryside at the time of the trial, for the Indian women dance to destroy them.[62] The rancher tells of Elena's frigidity toward him as he sees the vision of the Desert Elena; he confesses his own need for her, her rejection, and the violence it led to:

> RANCHER: My hands are empty--starved!
> ELENA: Fill them with chicken feathers! Or buzzard-feathers.
> RANCHER: My lips are dry.
> ELENA: Then drink from the cistern. Or if the cistern is empty, moisten your lips with the hungry blood of the fox that kills our fowls.
> RANCHER: The fox-blood burns![63]

All the images surrounding the Desert Elena are those of death--the buzzard feathers, a cistern instead of a living fountain,

[60] Ibid., p. 38.

[61] Ibid., p. 57.

[62] Ibid., p. 54.

[63] Ibid., p. 52.

dead chickens killed by a fox. The fox, of course, represents the rancher, burning with desire and finally killing because of it. She offers him none of the vibrant freedom which she gave to her brother. The rancher says that she will bear nothing, "nothing ever but death--which is all you will get / with your pitiful--stone kind of body." She replies that she will get something, something that will "come singing and shouting and plunging bare-back / down canyons / and run like wild birds home to Sangre de Cristo / when August crazes the sky. . ."[64] The resentful reticence of the Rancher breeds a need for destruction, and he finally delivers death to Elena, as described by Rosalio:

> Carry your axe and your bucket
> slow-clanking past frozen hen-houses
> where sinister stalactite fowls make rigid comment
> claw--beak--
> barely, perceptibly stirring their russet feathers.[65]

The image suggests Elena's coldness as well as the Rancher's

[64]Ibid., pp. 51-52. The image suggests her brother and freedom, which may foreshadow his own death, thereby joining her. Perhaps a more satisfactory interpretation is the purification from guilt through the revelation of truth in the trial and through the deaths of all three of the guilty ones.

[65]Ibid., p. 48.

own corrosive reticence, especially since she has been so closely associated with birds all through the play. The imagery surrounding Elena is purposely ambivalent, to show the two men's attitudes toward her.[66] As the vision of Elena of the Springs (love and life) returns, Rosalio plunges the knife into his breast. As the guilt is exposed, the rain begins, and as a final gesture of retribution, the Rancher takes his own knife for his own purification. The Judge closes the play with the comment that honor goes deeper than law--"If men keep honor, the rest can be arranged."[67] The theme of freedom and honor is conveyed in sexual terms through familiar Williamsian animal images. Benjamin Nelson has called the play "a vivid and haunting drama. . ., and certainly the most integrated work to emerge from this period of his playwriting. The verse is rich and the imagery is quite often stunning."[68]

A variety of vivid scenes appear in "The Strangest Kind of Romance," a dramatization of the story "The Maledicition."

[66]The Rancher describes Elena, however, in lyric terms when he tells of her flight from him: "The birds, already, the swallows, / before the rainstorm ceased, / had begun to climb / the atmosphere's clean spirals " (p. 55).

[67]Williams, "The Purification," p. 62.

[68]Nelson, p. 91.

The romance, of course, is between the little man and Nitchevo, the cat. An interesting change is the addition of the Old Man, who looks like Walt Whitman, to replace the old street derelict of the story. Williams puts his social comments in the mouth of the Old Man. In speaking of economics, he tells how the plant bosses create a scarcity of their product and boost the prices higher by cutting production:

> OLD MAN: Why, God Almighty--Nitchevo knows the answer! . . .What they'll cut down is production. . . .Independence goes--then pride--then hope. Finally even the ability of the heart to feel shame or despair or anything at all--goes, too. What's left? A creature like me. Whose need of companionship has become a nuisance to people. Well, somewhere along the line of misadventures--is the cat!
> LITTLE MAN: Nitchevo?
> OLD MAN: (nodding sagaciously) You are not able to buy cream any more. . . .Well, cats are capricious!
> LITTLE MAN: She isn't a fair-weather friend.
> OLD MAN: You think she'd be faithful to you? In adversity, even?
> LITTLE MAN: She'd be faithful to me.
> OLD MAN: (beaming slowly) Good! Good! (He touches his eyelids.) A beautiful trust. A rare and beautiful trust. It makes me cry a little. That's all that life has to give in the way of perfection. . .The warm and complete understanding of two or three in a close-walled room with the windows blind to the world. . . . And so we are saved and purified and exalted. We three? You and me and--Nitchevo, the cat!. . .Listen! She purrs! Mmm, such a soft and sweet and powerful sound it is. It's the soul of the universe--throbbing in her!. . .Take her and hold her close! Close! Never let her be separated from you. For while you're together--none of the evil powers on earth can destroy

> you. Not even the imbecile child which is chance--nor the mad, insatiable wolves in the hearts of men![69]

Salvation occurs, Williams seems to say, only when the odd ones of the world wall themselves in from reality. And though the Old Man assures the Little Man that he is safe while he has the cat, the evil power of chance can and does take over. As the Old Man says, life is full of accidents, chances, possibilities, and the Little Man may lose Nitchevo--"That's the trouble with love, the chance of loss."[70] Chance is symbolized by the Boxer, who makes this statement:

> Why, I've seen dozens of cats of every description--. . .--I've seen gray ones, black ones, white ones, spitted, spotted, and sputted! My relations with cats is strictly--laissez faire! Know what that means, buddy? Live and let live--a motto. I've never gone out of my way--. . .--to injure a cat. But when one gets in my way, I usually kick it![71]

A change in the fate of the Little Man and the cat occurs when he loses his job, when the landlady throws him over for the

[69]Tennessee Williams, "The Strangest Kind of Romance," Twenty-Seven Wagons, pp. 149-150.

[70]Ibid., p. 148.

[71]Ibid., p. 154.

boxer and turns him out, and when the cat becomes sick and is thrown out. (The vulgar landlady is a Williams stock character. She utters such banalities as "cat's got your tongue," "just hold your horses, horse-mouth," and "you were playing possum," and calls the relationship between the Little Man and Nitchevo ". . .the strangest kind of a romance. . .a man--and a cat! What we mustn't do is disregard nature. Nature says--'Man take woman or--man be lonesome!'. . .Nature has certainly never said, 'Man take cat!'"[72] She is evidently jealous of the cat as she tries to coax the Little Man to help her blow off steam. She says that the cat was bad luck to the Russian who had her before the Little Man took the room, but the Little Man says, "Nothing's unlucky that loves you."[73]) The theme of chance and how it so easily changes is presented with the image of the bird. The landlady says that many men have lived in the room, and they have signed their names on the wall. "Birds of passage. You ever try to count them? Restlessness--changes."[74] The old man says that the signatures are the men's little claim

[72]Ibid., p. 144.

[73]Ibid., p. 136.

[74]Ibid., p. 139.

of remembrance. "Their modest bids for immortality, daughter. Don't brush them away. Even a sparrow--leaves an empty nest for a souvenir."[75] The Old Man is the poet-figure of the play--like Tiresias, he is blind. He says his name is Man and that he is nailed to the cross of Cupidity and Stupidity. In the end, after his own daughter has sent him away with the police and after the Little Man goes sadly out to look for the stray cat, it is the Old Man who finds the cat in a sudden burst of joyful shouting. He had been unable to find her earlier in the play because of his blindness; he had said, "Ohhh, so the cat is present! That's what made the air in the room so soft and full of sweetness! Nitchevo--where are you?"[76] But Williams makes it unclear in the end where the Old Man comes from, where the Little Man goes, or whether by some mystical process the Little Man has been transformed into the Old Man. At any rate, the end is happy, with music sounding loud and triumphant.

The title piece of the volume, "Twenty-Seven Wagons Full of Cotton," has for its humor the character of Flora, who is

[75] Ibid., p. 140.

[76] Ibid., p. 147.

"an elephant woman who acks as frail as a kitten."[77] As the play opens, Flora is slapping at gnats attracted by the light and the sound of locusts is heard. These insect images foreshadow the destruction which will occur during the play. Flora gives a long nasal cry and a cow moos in the distance with the same inflection.[78] These quiet sounds are in contrast to the sound of the explosion of the Syndicate Plantation, the fire whistle, and voices which are "shrill, cackling like hens."[79] The next day Jake is busy ginning the cotton for Silva Vicarro, whose gin was destroyed in the fire. As Jake leaves Silva with Flora, a rooster crows in the distance, a foreshadowing of the sexual vengeance Silva takes on Flora for the destruction of his gin. In the scene between Silva and Flora, he begins to suspect Jake of arson because of her chattering about Jake's being gone for supper:

> FLORA: A fire is always exciting. After a fire, dogs an' chickens don't sleep. I don't think our chickens got to sleep all night. . . .They cackled

[77]Tennessee Williams, "Twenty-Seven Wagons Full of Cotton," Twenty-Seven Wagons, p. 25.

[78]Ibid., p. 3.

[79]Ibid., p. 4.

> an' fussed an' flopped around on the roost--took on something awful! Myself, I couldn't sleep neither. I jus' lay there an' sweated all night long.
> VICARRO: On account of th' fire?
> FLORA: An' the heat an' mosquitoes. And I was mad at Jake.
> VICARRO: Mad at Mr. Meighan? What about?
> FLORA: Oh, he went off an' left me settin' here on this ole po'ch last night without a Coca-Cola on the place.
> VICARRO: Went off an' left you, did he?
> FLORA: Yep. Right after supper. An' when he got back the fire 'd already broke out an'... he decided to go an' take a look. . . .I got smoke in my eyes an' my nose an' throat. . . . Finally took two teaspoons of paregoric. Enough to put an elephant to sleep. But still I stayed awake an' heard them chickens carryin' on out there.[80]

Very deliberately Vicarro begins to get even with Jake. He flatters Flora and, still sweet talking, but with whip in hand, drives her into the house. "Quit switching me, will yuh?" she says to his use of the whip, but he replies that he is just shooing the flies off.[81] After the off-stage rape scene, Flora appears ravaged, a ghostly moon highlighting her bruised body. Dogs are howling like demons across the fields of the Delta;[82] the sound adds to the shock value of the scene between Flora

[80] Ibid., p. 15.

[81] Ibid., p. 20.

[82] Ibid., p. 23.

and Jake, who never comprehends what has happened to his wife.

The characters are sharply delineated in this short play; they appear again, this time with Flora much younger and slimmer, in the movie Baby Doll. Aunt Rose of "The Unsatisfactory Supper" also appears. Just as the chickens carried on in "Twenty-Seven Wagons," an old hen, Old Fussy, comes in and out of the Meighans' house in Baby Doll, to show the decay of the plantation house, to add comic relief, to give Aunt Rose entrance and exit lines, and to symbolize the sex play that takes place between Baby Doll and Vacarro (the spelling has been changed from the earlier play). Old Fussy pecks at cornbread on the kitchen table at the beginning,[83] and after Archie Lee begins to suspect that Vacarro has gained entrance to Baby Doll's sexual favor--when he, her husband, has been locked out because she is not yet ready for marriage--the hen also appears in obvious sexual imagery:

> Old Fussy makes a slow stately entrance, pushing the door open wider with her fat hips and squawking peevishly at this slight inconvenience. Meighan. . . hurls empty bottle at her. She flaps and squawks back out. Her distressed outcries are taken up by her sisters, who are sensibly roosting.

[83]Tennessee Williams, Baby Doll (New York: Signet Books, 1956), p. 12.

> BABY DOLL (giggling): Law! Ole fussy mighty nearly made it that time! Why, that old hen was comin' in like she'd been invited t' supper.[84]

Earlier in the play Archie had compared Baby Doll to a hen--"For a woman of your modest nature that squawks like a hen if her husband dast to put his hand on her. . ."--and their angry voices are echoed by the wandering poultry in the yard.[85] Baby Doll, however, is more frequently compared to a horse. Her beads and earrings jingle "like a circus pony's harness"[86] and she sniffs the night air "like a young horse."[87] The horse imagery has obvious sexual connotations, especially when we see the furnishings of Baby Doll's nursery, which includes a hobby horse. When Vacarro enters the nursery, he sits astride the wooden horse, lashes its rump with the whip and rocks on it,[88] an obvious symbol of the sex mating to occur between him and Baby Doll.

On the other hand, Archie Lee is made the ridiculous

[84] Ibid., p. 119.

[85] Ibid., p. 15.

[86] Ibid., p. 17.

[87] Ibid., p. 104.

[88] Ibid., p. 89.

cuckold by the images surrounding him. He bounds from his car "like a jackrabbit"[89] and spends much of his time making plans to go frog gigging with a gang of other men. He is often compared to a dog. Baby Doll tells Vacarro that before she got married Archie Lee had been hanging around her "like a sick dog for quite some time."[90] When Archie says he'll have Aunt Rose cremated and pitch her remains in Tiger Tail Bayou, Baby Doll replies, "Doctor John? Come out here and take a look at my husband. I think a mad dawg's bit him. He's gone ravin' crazy."[91] When Archie returns from Memphis where he tried in vain to get a new saw-cylinder for the broken cotton gin, he realizes that Vacarro has tricked him into leaving and has come to some kind of understanding with Baby Doll. He has been on a wild goose chase. He becomes very sensitive to the wolf whistles the men give the scantily-clad Baby Doll and charges down the steps after the men. When he is ignored, he stalks back up to the porch, winded, "like an old hound. . ."[92] He threatens to blast them with his shotgun if they trespass on

[89] Ibid., p. 16.

[90] Ibid., p. 83.

[91] Ibid., p. 19.

[92] Ibid., p. 105.

his property, but Baby Doll mocks him: "Small dogs have a loud bark."[93] Other animals are descriptive of Archie. They serve to show his character and his strong emotions--mostly anger. When the furniture company calls to repossess the furniture, Archie grabs the phone with elephantine speed.[94] As Archie becomes angrier and angrier at the Italian and his wife, his breathing is as "heavy as a walrus in labor"[95] and his face is "purple as a baboon's behind."[96] Finally Archie, a "Wild-eyed old bull,"[97] starts shooting at Silva, and Baby Doll and is taken off by the police, leaving the natural sex mates free to go off to celebrate Baby Doll's readiness for marriage.

The background atmosphere varies from the sounds of the chickens to Aunt Rose's hymn singing--sex and religion again--to the sounds of the cotton gin machinery, apparently a symbol,

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid., p. 11.

[95] Ibid., p. 118.

[96] Ibid., p. 121.

[97] Ibid., p. 126.

writes Signi Falk, of the corrupting forces of industrial society.[98] The play opens with "a steady sound, furtive as a mouse scratching,"[99] at which Baby Doll is frightened until she discovers that it is only Archie Lee scratching at the plaster. This opening scene, as well as the dead insects which pattern the porch light,[100] further illustrate the decay of the old plantation house. Williams is probably taking a satiric thrust at the Meighans' lifestyle by naming the restaurant where Archie hangs out the "Flaming Pig" and the road where he lives "Tiger Tail Road." There are several conversations about frog-gigging, and Williams describes the background of the climactic evening: "The full frog-gigging moon emerges from a mackerel sky."[101] Later, the "crooked moon beams fitfully through a racing mackerel sky, the air full of motion."[102] The fish and the frog, according to Cirlot, are connected with the idea of water and hence with the concept of "primal waters."

[98]Falk, p. 115.

[99]Williams, Baby Doll, p. 7.

[100]Ibid., p. 104.

[101]Ibid., p. 106.

[102]Ibid., p. 125.

Consequently, they stand as symbols of the origins of things.[103]

In contrast to Archie Lee, whose world is crumbling around him, is Silva Vacarro, who is full of vitality (and virility) even on the day that his gin has been burned. He compares himself to the wild animals as he talks to Baby Doll about the fire in his gin:

> SILVA: I believe in the presence of evil spirits. . . Spirits of violence--and cunning--malevolence--cruelty--treachery--destruction. . . .
> BABY DOLL: Oh, them's just human characteristics.
> SILVA: They're evil spirits that haunt the human heart and take possession of it, and spread from one human heart to another human heart the way that a fire goes springing from leaf to leaf and branch to branch in a tree till a forest is all aflame with it--the birds take flight--the wild things are suffocated. . .everything green and beautiful is destroyed. . .[104]

But Silva is not destroyed by Archie's arson. His very wildness, illustrated by the way he eats chicken, tearing it apart and gnawing the meat off it,[105] by his wolf whistles at Baby Doll, by the way he walks and leaps with the spring of a healthy animal, by the whip he carries (Baby Doll attributes the welts

[103]Cirlot, p. 10.

[104]Williams, Baby Doll, p. 72.

[105]Ibid., p. 87.

on her skin to mosquito bites, but there are suggestions here of the sadism found in "Twenty-Seven Wagons"), makes him triumph in the end.

Another of Williams's collections of short plays is Dragon Country, the title of which is suggested by Alexandra del Lago in the earlier full-length play, Sweet Bird of Youth. The dragon country is what Alexandra calls "the beanstalk country, the ogre's country at the top of the beanstalk, the country of the flesh-hungry, blood-thirsty ogre--"[106] She calls herself a monster from that country who has retired to the moon, "that withered, withering country."[107] But she is a monster who hangs on a long time, and finally says "I climbed back alone up the beanstalk to the ogre's country where I live now, alone."[108] Williams explores the themes of loneliness and violence in the eight short plays collected in Dragon Country. The title of the volume is explicitly stated in "I Can't Imagine Tomorrow," about two lonely and unimportant people, called simply ONE and TWO.[109] ONE, the stronger of the two,

[106]Tennessee Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth (London: Secker & Warburg, 1959), pp. 73-74.

[107]Ibid., p. 28.

[108]Ibid., p. 89.

[109]Their lack of a name emphasizes their lack of an individual identity.

describes the dragon country as she gazes out the windowframe:

> Dragon Country, the country of pain, is an uninhabitable country which is inhabited, though. Each one crossing through that huge, barren country has his own separate track to follow across it alone. If the inhabitants, the explorers of Dragon Country, looked about them, they'd see other explorers, but in this country of endured but unendurable pain each one is so absorbed, deafened, blinded by his own journey across it, he sees, he looks for, no one else crawling across it with him. . . .--I won't cross into that country where there's no choice anymore.[110]

Indeed, though TWO, a junior high teacher who can only talk with ONE and then only in incomplete sentences, comes to ONE for friendship and encouragement, the two characters cannot break out of their self-absorption to communicate with each other. ONE urges TWO to "open your mouth even if you just open your mouth to say you heard an owl tonight, imitating your voice in a palm tree. . . ."[111] But such conversation is futile--ONE adds that of course no one would believe him if he said such a thing--as are any attempts at communicating or being together. ONE tells TWO, "All right, now, you can

[110]Tennessee Williams, "I Can't Imagine Tomorrow," Dragon Country (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 138.

[111]Ibid., p. 145.

stay here if you want to. You wouldn't get in my way, I wouldn't get in yours. After a couple of days we'd hardly notice each other. It would be like talking to ourselves, or hearing a bird or a cricket outside."[112] In other words, they ignore each other. Such an isolated existence is very near the isolation of the grave, and both characters have an aura of death about them, ONE living in sickness and TWO living in a hotel with a lobby full of dying old women from which he comes "like a sick dog."[113] The realities of their world deceives them, just as the roosters are deceived by the brightness of the night and crow all night because they think it is near daybreak.[114] This disorientation from reality experienced by ONE and TWO is further emphasized by a recurring image of white cranes which TWO sees on a lawn on his walk over to ONE's house.

> TWO:. . .the house was dark and the lawn was filled with white cranes. I guess at least twenty white cranes were stalking about on the lawn. . . .At first I thought I was seeing things. . . .I suppose they were migrating on their way further south.

[112] Ibid., p. 150.

[113] Ibid., p. 139.

[114] Ibid., p. 148.

> ONE: Yes, and stopped off on the lawn of the dark house, perhaps to elect a new leader because the old one, the one before, was headed in the wrong direction, a little disoriented or losing altitude, huh? So they stopped off on the lawn of the dark house to change their flight plans or just to feel the cool of the evening grass under their feet before they continued their travels. . . .I think they'd accept you in your lovely white suit.[115]

Traditionally, cranes represent justice, goodness, diligence, and longevity.[116] Williams uses them ironically here to represent just the opposite. The cranes, like ONE and TWO, are travelling in the Dragon Country--a journey which ends only in death.[117]

Death images occur repeatedly in Dragon Country. Almost all the symbols of "I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix," a play about D. H. Lawrence, point to death. Williams envisions Lawrence in his last fight, "the tiger in him trapped but not destroyed yet."[118] Lawrence sits before a silk banner which bears his favorite symbol, the Phoenix in a nest of flames.

[115]Ibid., pp. 136-137.

[116]Cirlot, p. 63.

[117]Since the birds are flying south, we can assume that it is winter, another archetypal death symbol.

[118]Tennessee Williams, "I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix," Dragon Country, p. 59.

The phoenix myth is one of the most widespread; it represents regeneration as well as purification by fire. Implicit in the image is the ambivalent idea of life in death, an idea explored further in the play through the relationship of Frieda and Lawrence. Later in the play, Frieda, Lawrence's German wife, refers to him as an "old Phoenix--you brave and angry old bird in your nest of flames!"[119] The relationship between Frieda and Lawrence is portrayed as a fiery, clawing union in which, according to Frieda Lawrence's introductory note to the play, "the eternal antagonism and attraction between man and woman" is their bond.[120] From the opening Lawrence and Frieda are at each other's throats like screeching cats. After she brings him a jar of marmalade left by a timid female admirer, she starts to take it from him, but "quick as a cat he snatches her wrists in a steel grip." He asks if she thought she had tamed him, and she replies,

> Yes, but I should have known better. I should have suspected what you've been doing inside you, lapping

[119] Ibid., p. 66.

[120] Frieda Lawrence, introduction to "I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix," quoted in Nelson, Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work, p. 84.

> that yellow cream up, you sly old fox, sucking the fierce red sun in your body all day and turning it into venom to spew in my face![121]

The life-death, love-hate ambivalence of the sun here is further explored in their dialogue about the goldfish. Lawrence demands that Frieda put the aquarium on the window sill so that he can keep an eye on it.

> LAWRENCE: --That detestable cat has attacked the goldfish again. . . .
> FRIEDA: She's gone outside.
> LAWRENCE: To lick her chops, God damn her! Set the goldfish bowl on the window sill.
> FRIEDA: You can't keep them there in the sun. The sun will kill them.
> LAWRENCE [furiously] : Don't answer me back, put 'em there!
> FRIEDA [in German] : All right, all right! She hastens to place the aquarium on the sill.
> LAWRENCE: You know what I think? I think you fed her the fish. It's so like you to do such a thing. You're both so fat, so rapacious, so viciously healthy and hungry!
> FRIEDA: Such a fuss over a goldfish!
> LAWRENCE: It isn't just a goldfish.[122]

Lawrence sees himself as the goldfish, the life snuffed out of him by the cat-Frieda or else burned up in the sun's heat. He knows he is dying, and his fervent wish is to die alone,

[121]Williams, "I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix," p. 61.

[122]Ibid., p. 65.

without females clucking around him.[123] He tells Frieda, "Quit clucking, you old wet hen," and later, "Cluck-cluck-cluck-cluck! You better watch out for the rooster, you old wet hen!"[124] He makes Frieda promise to leave him alone at the moment of his dying and to keep anyone from touching him.

> I have a nightmarish feeling that while I'm dying I'll be surrounded by women.--They'll burst in the door and the windows the moment I lose the strength to push them away.--They'll moan and they'll flutter like doves around the burnt-out Phoenix. . .--All of the under- and over-sexed women I've known, who think me the oracle of their messed-up libidos.--They'll all return with their suffocating devotion. --I don't want that.--I want to die like a lonely old animal does, I want to die fiercely and cleanly with nothing but anger and fear and other hard things like that to deal with at the finish. . .I've still got a bit of the male left in me and that's the part that I'm going to meet death with.[125]

Ironically, the artist who has attempted to liberate sex from stifling prudery is suffocated by the devotion of those whom he has liberated. Also ironic is that his life should come

[123]For a complete discussion of Lawrence's fear of females, the destructive force of the female and of copulation, and the ambivalent male-female relationship in this play, see Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work, pp. 84-90.

[124]Williams, "I Rise in Flame," pp. 66-67, 70.

[125]Ibid., pp. 63-64.

out in books rather than in some kind of violent action. He yearns to get astride "a strong white horse and go off like the wind across the glittering desert."[126] The white horse traditionally symbolizes not only intense feeling and sexuality, but also death. He longs to return to the desert and become a savage, experiencing life with the intensity he feels, but he admits that the male savage part of him is dead. All that is left is the old "pusillanimous squaw," a sentimental man remembering nursery rhymes about the ladybug's house afire, a man desiring a resurrection of life and of intensity of feelings through the facing of death alone, pure as flame.

Death is also the subject of "The Frosted Glass Coffin" but the death here is not so noble. Williams explores the plight of the aged in a retirement hotel, where most of the inhabitants have "crossed that age limit where the human body, all of its functions and its processes, are so slowed down that they live a sort of crocodile existence that seems to go on forever. . . ."[127] The ambivalence of Williams's feelings toward the aged is symbolized by the crocodile, a creature

[126] Ibid., p. 62.

[127] Tennessee Williams, "The Frosted Glass Coffin," Dragon Country, p. 208.

which has been both venerated as a god and treated as an enemy. It was endowed both with absolute impotence and with the maximum of generative power. Furthermore, it did not use its tongue (just as Mr. Kelsey in the play does not), and was therefore a symbol of silence and wisdom.[128] The five characters in the play, specified only by number except when their names are mentioned in the script, converse about Mr. Kelsey, an extremely weak and senile resident whose wife has just died the night before. The characters express surprise that Kelsey has outlived his wife, since he had to be cared for like an infant and was in and out of Mercy Hospital "like a jack rabbit."[129] A nursing home seems to be the only answer for Kelsey now, "unless they chloroform him like an old dog."[130] As Mr. Kelsey enters, he blinks at the intensity of the zinc-white glare of the morning light, which, Williams has told us in the stage directions, washes out all the colors on the stage and suggests frosted glass.[131] Kelsey taps with his cane,

[128]Rowland, pp. 55-56.

[129]Williams, "Glass Coffin," p. 207.

[130]Ibid., p. 208.

[131]The frosted glass coffin is explained by ONE, who says, "In our age bracket you're living in a glass coffin, a frosted coffin, you just barely see light through it. . . .Frosted glass coffin, unburied!" p. 205.

"his advance onto the walk like that of an old turtle."[132] Interestingly, the turtle traditionally represents longevity, and, by extension, slowness and stagnation.[133] Kelsey's presence hushes the men, and when they resume talking, their voices are different, subdued. Yet they continue to skirt the subject of death in almost every sentence. Finally, as the other characters move off to cross the street to breakfast, the zinc white brightens and Kelsey is left alone onstage.

> Kelsey raises his cane and brings it down hard on the pavement: the light begins to dim out to a crepuscular pallor. Kelsey closes his cataract-blinded eyes and opens his jaws like a fish out of water. After a few moments, a sound comes from his mouth which takes the full measure of grief. CURTAIN.[134]

Although the images of Kelsey indicate contempt, or at least ridicule (he is compared to a crocodile, an old dog, an old turtle, and a fish out of water), there is a dignity in his behavior denied the other characters who describe him in these terms. Though he is deaf and sees the world through cataracts, as if through a barely translucent frosted glass coffin, his

[132]Williams, "Glass Coffin," p. 209.

[133]Cirlot, p. 334.

[134]Williams, "Glass Coffin," p. 214.

emotions are not muffled or dimmed. The final image suggests not only the imminent death of Mr. Kelsey but also indicts a society which removes its aged from the mainstream of life to die like fish out of water from a lack of interest, or from lack of contact with the rest of the society.

"In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel" repeats the death theme found in most of the plays of Dragon Country. The artist-figure, Mark, feels that his work is leading him to the Dragon Country, "as if I were crossing the frontier of a country I have no permission to enter, but I enter, this, this! I tell you, it terrifies me!"[135] He is terrified by the intimacy, the one-ness that exists between the painter and his work; he is terrified because he has not yet learned to control the new style of work, which is at first stronger than he is, and which he suspects that tigers are hiding in.[136] Like the tigers in the work of "The Dangerous Painters," these tigers represent the base powers and instincts, the darkness of Mark's soul, and this recognition of himself frightens him:

> MARK: The images flash in my brain, and I have to get them on nailed-down canvas at once or they.

[135]Tennessee Williams, "In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel," Dragon Country, p. 19.

[136]Ibid., pp. 21-22.

> MIRIAM: Flash back out of your brain. . . .
> MARK: There's a feeling of, a sense of. . . . of, of. . . .Adventuring into a jungle country with wild men crouching in bushes, in in, in--trees, with poison arrows to.
> MIRIAM: Yes, to kill you, and they've nearly done it.
> MARK: Color. . . .I didn't know it till now. Color, color, and light! Before us and after us, too. What I'm saying is--color isn't passive, it, it--has a fierce life in it!. . .The possibilities of color and light, discovered all at once, can make a man fall on the street. I've heard that finally on earth there'll be nothing but gigantic insects but now I know the last things, the imperishable things, are color and light.[137]

The fear he feels in his work cannot be separated from a fear of death. In the second part of the play, as Mark sits at the table with his wife Miriam and a friend-agent-homosexual Leonard, he is struggling to catch his breath and says that he was always willing to die:

> MARK: . . .The time you wait. To catch your breath, or <u>not</u> catch it. . . .The time you wait to recover. Or not to recover. And you're so revolted by the fear that you feel.
> LEONARD: Fear is a built-in protection. Nothing to be ashamed of. I doubt that any living creature of the, the, us, animal, mammal species isn't provided with it. Possibly fish don't have it. No, I think even fish are frightened when they're.

[137] <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 23-24.

MIRIAM: You have a remarkable facility for keeping things at sea level.[138]

Miriam's insensitivity to her husband's suffering and death is clear. She says that she wanted to be alone, but he followed her here "like the tin can that children tie to the tail of a cat in an alley."[139] When she hears of her husband's death, she feels only release from him. She shows her contempt of him by saying he stinks like a goat--and we find that she has cuckolded him by her affairs, giving him the horns of the goat. Moreover, their sexual roles seem to have been reversed. Miriam aggressively suggests sexual adventures to the barman and remembers similar incidents with other men as she sits at the bar smoking a pipe. Her hat is crowned with blue-black cock feathers,[140] trophies, perhaps, of the males she has emasculated by her "vitality" which absorbs everything around her.[141] She prides this Western vitality while scorning the Oriental "inner resources of serenity" as hog-wash--"wash a hog in

[138] _Ibid_., pp. 45-46.

[139] _Ibid_., p. 47.

[140] _Ibid_., p. 3.

[141] Williams suggests that this vitality is peculiarly American: "In America what we have is an explosion of vitality which is world-wide," says Miriam (p. 3). This indictment of American society, as well as the character of Miriam, echoes _The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone_.

it, don't turn it on me. 'Inner resources of serenity' is a polite way of describing a lack of vital energy."[142] It is interesting, however, that with all her tough language and manner, she is as afraid of dying as her husband:

> . . .And I fear death, I know it would have to remove, wrench, tear!--the bracelets off my arms. . .To be old, suddenly old--no! Unacceptable to me on any terms. So I wait in dread. Terror, yes, I could say terror! [She wrenches her brilliant bracelets up and down on her arms.] No inner resources of serenity in me at all.[143]

And though she speaks of going on without Mark, she seems to have lost her vitality with his death. In her final lines she says, "I have no plans. I have nowhere to go," and with that she wrenches the bracelets from her arms and flings them to her feet.[144]

"The Mutilated" and "The Gnadiges Fraulein" were presented as part of a double bill entitled Slapstick Tragedy on February 22, 1966. Williams calls these two plays "short, fantastic works whose content is a dislocated and wildly idiomatic sort of tragedy. . . .The style of the plays is kin to

[142]Williams, "Tokyo Hotel," Dragon Country, p. 5.

[143]Ibid., p. 37.

[144]Ibid., p. 53.

vaudeville, burlesque and slapstick, with a dash of pop art thrown in. . . .a pair of fantastic allegories on the tragi-comic subject of human existence on this risky planet."[145] The nonrealistic style of "The Mutilated" is suggested by the sets, delicate, abstract, and spidery as Japanese line drawings. "The Mutilated" tells of two prostitutes, Trinket and Celeste, who fight and make up during the play. Trinket has had a breast removed, but Celeste is excessively proud of her bosom, commenting that "many women past forty or even thirty have boobs like a couple of mules hanging their heads over the top rail of a fence."[146] She uses the knowledge of Trinket's secret operation, her mutilation, to get wine and money from the more financially solvent Trinket. Yet for all her cruel remarks about Trinket's mutilation, Celeste displays a sense of sympathy, realizing that she herself is lost--"we all have our mutilations, some from birth, and some from later in life, and some stay with us forever."[147] She shows her sense of compassion in her remarks about the bird-girl, a symbol of all

[145] Tennessee Williams, "Preface to Slapstick Tragedy," Esquire, LVIII (December, 1962), 95.

[146] Tennessee Williams, "The Mutilated," Dragon Country, p. 85.

[147] Ibid., p. 87.

the freaks in the world, who moves with a shuffling, pigeon-toed gait and occasionally makes angry noises. Celeste knows that the bird-girl is merely Rampart Street Rose with chicken feathers glued to her because Celeste herself was once the bird-girl and got two-degree burns from the hot glue. As the bird-girl whistles and croaks wildly as she flaps away, Celeste picks up a loose feather and says,

> Poor Rosie, she lost some feathers, ah, well, that's life for you, tch, tch! If she was a bird, the humane society would be interested in her situation but since she's a human being, they couldn't care less. . . .How about that? I mean the irony of it?[148]

Just as the bird-girl has lost her feather, Trinket has lost her breast and Celeste has lost her hotel room. Each loss, however, is a symbol of something more: because she dares not expose her mutilation, Trinket has lived without love for three years; and because she is dependent on the kindness of others for a place to stay, Celeste has lost some of her courage and self-respect. Celeste accuses Trinket of having two mutilations--"The worst mutilation you've got," she screams, "is a crime of the Christian commandments, STINGINESS, CHEAPNESS,

[148]*Ibid.*, pp. 85-87.

PURSE PRIDE!"[149] Indeed, Trinket has "a wad of money that you could choke a horse with,"[150] but it does not give her the companionship she longs for. She is withering from lack of love; at one point she makes a sound like a hooked fish would make if it could made a sound.[151] Her every thought seems to be of the lost breast: she thinks of the infant Jesus longing for the breast of the Madonna (the ironic setting is Christmas eve and the song of carolers is a counterpoint to the action); and at the Cafe Boheme she quotes "Tiger, Tiger, burning bright" to the proprietor named Tiger,[152] bringing to mind the "fearful symmetry" of the tall sailor, Slim, who has just entered, and her own lack of beauty and symmetry. Both Celeste and Trinket are attracted to Slim. When Slim's friend Bruno suggests to Trinket that they "do it" outside, Trinket replies, "You're talking about alley cats, and you don't understand: I'm attracted to your friend. . .Get him out of the bar before the wolves snatch him away."[153] Trinket indicates that she wants

[149] Ibid., p. 117.

[150] Ibid., pp. 96, 107.

[151] Ibid., p. 101.

[152] Ibid., p. 104.

[153] Ibid., p. 108.

him for Christmas, but he appears with Celeste, called "old Madam Goat" because of her drunken singing. When Trinket calls her a shoplifter (the epithet is true enough), she squares off like a bull about to charge, stamping and pawing the ground. Trinket says she's infested with vermin and lice, and when Celeste spits at her, she cries, "Where's the toad? Wherever a witch spits it produces a toad!"[154] The toad, as an inverse of the frog, suggests infertility. The humorous catfight ends with Celeste snatching Trinket's empty purse and Trinket taking Slim home with her only to find no sex and a trace of sadism. Trinket offers Slim companionship and the story of the high point in her life when she planned and organized a funeral for Mr. Depression as a public relations stunt only to be dispersed by a heavy rain--"it rained cats, dogs, crocodiles--ZEBRAS!" But Slim pays no attention and Trinket might just as well be alone. At the same time, Celeste sits alone downstairs, at times taunting Trinket, once throwing back her head "like a dog yowling at the moon."[155] After Bruno takes Slim away, Trinket finally invites Celeste to join her in her room, and the two women share their loneliness over wine and vanilla wafers that

[154] Ibid., pp. 109-110.

[155] Ibid., p. 117.

Celeste finds in a tin box along with a dead cockroach. Celeste picks the bug out of the box, tosses it out the door and immediately starts munching a wafer as Trinket implores her not to eat after a cockroach. She goes on to say, "Today I found!--A scorpion in my bed. . ." referring to the hurt and deceit she received from Slim. Celeste tells her to forget it--she wants her to forget Slim, forget the past, think only of the future for which she plans dinner at Arnaud's, an afternoon movie, a Hershey bar, and their lives together.[156] Trinket enters into the delusion of hope for the future when Celeste detects an invisible presence in the room: In her speech she suggests that mutilation--being cut off--is being alone and homeless:

> CELESTE: . . .There was an elderly sister at Sacred Heart Convent School that received invisible presences, and once she told me that if I was ever cut off and forgotten by the blood of my blood and was homeless alone in the world, I would receive the invisible presence of Our Lady in a room I was in.[157]

As Trinket touches the presence, she cries that the pain in her breast is gone, and both women cry that a miracle has

[156] Ibid., pp. 125-126.

[157] Ibid., p. 127.

finally come. The carollers sing, "A miracle, a miracle! / The light of wonder in our eyes. . .But that's a dream, for dream we must / That we're made not of mortal dust," as Jack in Black, the death figure, lifts his hat and says to expect him but not yet--to forget him for a little while.[158] The carollers suggest the theme of regeneration that recurs in Williams's work--that we will rise after we have fallen and thereby hold death at bay; that the women can bury the hatchet and thereby keep loneliness away, at least for a little while. Forgetting death and loneliness for a little while, Williams suggests, is the only miracle we can hope for.

"The Gnadiges Fraulein" has as its unifying image the cocaloony bird, an imaginary creature which Williams describes as "a sort of giant pelican; in fact, all through the first draft of the play I have typed the word 'pelican,' scratched it out and written over it "cocaloony.'"[159] Legend has it that the pelican loved its young so dearly that it nourished them with its own blood, pecking open its own breast to this end; thus it is one of the best-known allegories of Christ.

[158] Ibid., pp. 129-130.

[159] Tennessee Williams, "The Gnadiges Fraulein," Dragon Country, p. 218.

Whether Williams knew the legend is unknown; but the martyr can easily become the Fraulein, and the inversion of the image of the bird itself coincides with other inverted images, expecially those concerning God. Williams specifies that everything on-stage is in the gray and grayish white you see in pelican feathers and the costumes of the women, Polly and Molly, are also in pelican colors. The play opens with repeated swooshing over Polly, who gives a detailed description of the birds in the prologue:

> POLLY: Was that two cocaloony birds that flew over or was it just one cocaloony bird that made a U-turn and flew back over again? OOPS! Bird-watchers, watch those birds! They're very dangerous birds if agitated and they sure do seem to be agitated today. . . . Yais, everything's southernmost here, like southern fried chicken is southern<u>most</u> fried chicken. But who's got a chicken? None of us southernmost white Anglo-Saxon Protestants are living on fish and fish only because of thyroid deficiency in our southern-most systems: we live on fish because regardless of faith or lack of it, every day is Friday, gastronomic-ally speaking, because of the readjustment of the economy which is southernmost too. . . .the vicious, over-grown sea birds which are called cocaloonies are responsible for the name and notoriety of this. . . particular Key. . . .Cocaloonies! They never fly off the fish-docks except in hurricane weather. Except in hurricane weather they just hand around and goof off on the fish-docks, mentally drifting and dreaming till animated by the-- [She whistles between two fingers as if calling a cab]--of a fish-boat coming in with a good haul of fish. Oh, then

> they're animated, they waddle and flap, flap and waddle out toward where the boat's docked to catch the fish thrown away. . .they flap and waddle out to the boat with their beaks wide open on their elastic gullets to catch the throwaway fish, the discards, the re-jecks, because, y'see,. . .the once self-reliant-and-self-sufficient character of this southernmost sea bird has degenerated to where it could be justly described as a parasitical creature. . .[160]

The birds serve several purposes in the play: they give comedy--slapstick, if you please--with their spastic jerky motions, their gruesome appearance, and their swooshing, flopping, whistling, awking noises to a play about the vicious rat-race for survival and a flophouse where death takes an inhabitant every night; they represent the evil forces of society and nature against the individual, as represented by the Fraulein; and they serve to make the Fraulein a more sympathetic character, since she is in competition with them for the thrown-away fish at the docks:

> MOLLY:. . .She's shamelessly, blamelessly, gone into competition with the cocaloonies for the throw-away fish. When a fish-boat whistles and the cocaloonies waddle rapidly forward, out she charges to compete for the catch. Well, they got a closed shop, the cocaloonies, they seem to be unionized, Polly, and

[160] Ibid., pp. 219-220.

> naturally regard the Gnadiges Fraulein as a wildcat operator and take a not-so-bright view of her dock activities, Polly. Nothing is more intolerant, Polly, than one parasite of another. So. . .finally, today, there was a well-organized resistance movement against her. Yep, they turned on her today and she returned from the fish-docks in a damaged condition, no fish in her bucket and no eye in one eye socket. [During this the cocaloony stands still cocking his head with a wing to his ear--occasionally stomping.][161]

The Fraulein is required by the landlady Molly to deliver "three fish a day to keep eviction away and one fish more to keep the wolf from the door."[162] Molly wants Polly to steer the Fraulein to the subject of fish, "'cause if she wants to maintain a residence in the big dormitory, after sundown, the subject of fish has got to be kept active in her thought waves."[163] The Fraulein is one of the more or less permanent guests in the "big dormitory under the rooftree of God." Molly sells standing room only--"Flamingoes can sleep standin' up on one leg, even"[164]--in the big dormitory where, says Molly, some of the transients "can't find their equilibrium or concentration or will to continue the struggle for survival when they

[161] Ibid., pp. 238-239.

[162] Ibid., pp. 239, 257-258.

[163] Ibid., p. 230.

[164] Ibid., p. 227.

get up in the morning--and some don't get up because every night someone dies."[165] That the entire Southernmost region is dying economically is hinted in the prologue; and as Molly is mopping up blood from the floor, Polly says that there had not been a live or dead piece of poultry on the premises since that old Rhode Island red hen that Molly was fattening up for Thanksgiving died of malnutrition before Hallowe'en.[166] Like the southern society, and like the "once self-reliant-and-self-sufficient" cocaloony birds, the Gnadiges Fraulein has also had a more glorious past. In the golden age of Vienna, she had performed before crowned heads of Europe in a trained seal act. Once, after the seal had performed his most famous trick and the trainer had thrown him a fish, the Gnadiges Fraulein pulled a surprise gimmick to build up her bit. According to the press clippings which the blinded Fraulein reads with a mixture of triumph and regret, "The talented young soubrette astonished her audience as well as her fellow performers when she cleverly intercepted a rather large mackerel thrown to the seal by catching this same rather large mackerel

[165] Ibid., p. 228.

[166] Ibid., p. 222.

in her own lovely jaws!"[167] She fell from the height of fame, however, at a gala performance before crowned heads in Brussels--or at the Royal in Copenhagen:

> When she made her sudden advance, her kangaroo leap, to intercept the fish that was thrown to the seal, the seal turned on her and fetched her such a terrific CLOUT!! [Drum.] Left flipper, right flipper! [Drum.] --To her delicate jawbone that her pearly whites flew from her mouth like popcorn out of a popper. [Drum.] . . . After that? She drifted. The Gnadiges Fraulein just drifted <u>and</u> drifted and <u>drifted</u>. . . .--She lost her sense of reality and she drifted. . . . .--Eventually she showed on the Southernmost Key.[168]

Like Karen Stone, she struggles to get from one day to the next. In her competition with the cocaloonies for the fish, she is reduced to behaving just as they do, making harsh cries and "flapping her long, thin arms and waddling very rapidly like a cocaloony."[169] Yet she retains some measure of her dignity. When she sings, her voice is clear and sweet as a songbird's, and at one point she is "transfigured as a saint under torture."[170] However, she loses concentration when she sings,

[167] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 247.

[168] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 257.

[169] <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 241-242, 250.

[170] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 245.

freezing in mid-gesture and opening and closing her mouth like a goldfish--Molly says that she's demonstrating "either a goldfish in a goldfish bowl or a society reporter in a soundproof telephone booth."[171] Williams seems to be saying that the golden, Romantic age is past; if it exists at all, as it may in the blond Indian Joe, tawny gold as a palomino horse, it exists only in the illusion of beauty, for Indian Joe is beautiful only in appearance. He is out for what he can get. Although he is extremely attractive, he is indolent, narcissistic, and devoid of any compassion for the Fraulein (as are Polly and Molly). He says, "I feel like a bull!" to which Polly responds, "MOOOO! MOOOO!"[172] When the Fraulein returns with an oversized fish, hard pressed by a cocaloony, which flaps violently and whistles above her and finally gets in the house, sticks a gruesome head out the window, and runs out the front door with the large fish in its beak, Indian Joe offers no help but to complain that the bird is in the house. Later, just before the final curtain, the Fraulein cooks another fish she has caught for Indian Joe, but Polly and Molly take it

[171] Ibid., p. 233.

[172] Ibid., p. 251.

without her knowing. Joe says, "NO FISH IN SKILLET," and joins Polly and Molly in devouring the fish, while the Gnadiges Fraulein, hearing the boat whistle, starts a wild blind dash for the fish docks. A sense of frustration and loneliness pervades the play, in spite of--or perhaps because of--its wild, meaningless action. The appearance of the Fraulein, tulle skirt sprinkled with blood, bloody bandage on her face and pink-orange curls framing the bandage, is as fantastic as that of the gruesome, stinking cocaloony--(it is said to smell like that mysterious old sea monster that washed up and rotted in Dizzy Bitch Key after Hurricane Lulu[173]). Both have outlived their former self-sufficient characters to be forced by circumstances into becoming pathetic, vicious parasites, able only to struggle for survival. That the other characters--Molly, Polly, and Indian Joe--are even more vicious parasites who do not even attempt the struggle serves only to make the Fraulein and the cocaloony appear even more ridiculous, for the struggle itself is meaningless. The Fraulein, unable to see that, continues grabbing her bucket and running out to the dock.

[173] _Ibid._, p. 236.

The garish, grotesquerie of "The Gnadiges Fraulein" characterizes a play written earlier by Williams and included in this volume, "A Perfect Analysis Given by a Parrot." Like the two prostitutes of "The Mutilated," the two women of this play are friends who constantly criticize and bicker with each other. This kind of "friendship" seems to be the theme; because Flora, the thin one, has had her fortune read by a parrot who said, "You have a sensitive nature, and are frequently misunderstood by your close companions." Flora thinks this is a perfect analysis, but Bessie, the fat one, scoffs, and the two continue to bicker until they are picked up by two conventioneers at the final curtain.

The last play of Dragon Country, "Confessional," was reworked into Small Craft Warnings, which was produced off-Broadway in 1972. The play is about a group of misfits, trying to make it through the night in Monk's Place, a bar. They are, by design, small people, tiny abandoned vessels, unable to make their way through a life of insignificance and bleakness. In contrast to them is the impressive varnished sailfish mounted over the bar, "whose gaping bill and goggle eyes give it a constant look of amazement."[174] The sailfish, unlike the

[174]Tennessee Williams, Small Craft Warnings (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 11 and "Confessional," Dragon Country, p. 153.

characters, still has the capacity to be surprised. This capacity, this innocence, is explained by Quentin, the jaded homosexual, during his "confession"[175]:

> Suppose I woke up some midnight and found that peculiar thing [that fantastic sailfish] swimming around in my bedroom? . . .No, not in a bowl or aquarium: free, unconfined. . . .Granted. It's impossible. But suppose it occurred just the same. . . Suppose I woke up and discovered it there, swimming round and round in the darkness over my bed, with a faint phosphorescent glow in its big goggle-eyes and its gorgeously iridescent fins and tail making a swishing sound as it circles around and about and around and about right over my head in my bed. . . . What do you think I would say?. . .I'll tell you what I would say: "Oh, well. . ." "Oh, well" is all I would say before I went back to sleep. . . .I've lost the capacity for being surprised, so completely lost it, that if I woke up in my bedroom late some night and saw that fantastic fish swimming right over my head, I wouldn't be really surprised.[176]

While the spotlight concentrates on him, an eerie glow remains on the sailfish, and he explains that the experience of most homosexuals is a deadening coarseness, a life empty of interest

[175]Each character has his literal time in the spotlight when he says his piece about himself, the world, philosophy, and whatnot; hence the title of the earlier version and the cryptic bar name "Monk's Place," which serves as a cloistered refuge for the confessional.

[176]Williams, Small Craft Warnings, pp. 44-46; "Confessional," pp. 176-178.

and surprise.[177] Not only homosexuals, but all the characters at the bar except Leona convey this lack of variation and surprise in their lives. Leona, the only one who goes on to embrace life by leaving the circle of derelicts, says, "I'll come back to pay up whatever I owe here and say good-bye to the sailfish, hooked and shellacked and strung up like a flag over. . .over. . .lesser, much lesser. . .creatures that never, ever sailed an inch in their. . .lives. . ."[178] There is an implicit conflict between Leona and the rest of the characters. She breaks with the group, showing her power of survival. She is active, while the others are passive; she constantly moves about the bar, entering "like a small bull making his charge into the ring."[179] She herself notes that she is "moving about tonight like an animal in a zoo. . ."[180] When she fights with the rest, Monk, Doc, Bill, and Steve approach her warily

[177]Two animal images refer to homosexuals in groups in this play. Steve comments that "the coast is overrun with 'em they come running out here like animals out of a brushfire," thus suggesting the fear and the need for refuge of most homosexuals. In the same conversation Monk says that he does not encourage them in his bar: "First thing you know you're operating what they call a gay bar and it sounds like a bird cage. . ." Small Craft Warnings, p. 50; "Confessional," pp. 181-182.

[178]Ibid., p. 25; "Confessional," p. 159.

[179]Ibid., p. 16.

[180]Ibid., p. 40; "Confessional," p. 173.

as trainers approaching an angry "big cat."[181] Bill, an inefficient stud who has been living with her, says that she makes him think of a polar bear in the circus he saw that rode a three-wheel bicycle;[182] and Violet, a water-weak prostitute who is looking for a place to spend the night, says she is like a wild animal.[183] Thus Williams conveys the strength--and the humor--of Leona by suggesting her similarity to strong, wild animals; and by using the idea of a zoo or circus animal, he conveys the idea of her imprisonment within the society that frequents the bar and her need to escape that society.

Leona's comments about the other characters at the bar further suggest the conflict between her and the rest. Several times she calls Monk a "monkey-faced mother"[184] and Bill an ape.[185] She says that Bill cared so little for her that sometimes when she passed out from drinking he would leave her on the floor, "and sometimes you stepped on me even, yeah, like

[181] Ibid., p. 36.

[182] Ibid., p. 31; "Confessional," p. 165.

[183] Ibid., p. 63; "Confessional," p. 189.

[184] Ibid., pp. 23, 43; "Confessional," pp. 157-175.

[185] Ibid., pp. 24, 30; "Confessional," p. 158.

I was a rug or a bug, because your nature is selfish."[186] When she tells the bar that he thinks the sun rises and sets between his legs, he tells her to go out and tell it to the sea gulls, they would be more interested.[187] She shows her contempt of Violet by comparing her to a dog or a parasite; she says Violet lives like an animal in a room with no bath, yet she is the one who takes care of Violet when she is sick:

> She didn't have any silver. . .but she ate the chicken, aw, yeah, she ate the chicken like a dog would eat it, she picked it up in her paws and gnawed at it just like a dog. . . .every day after work I come by that Goddam rathole with a bottle of hot beef bouillon or a chicken or meat-loaf. . . .She's just a parasite creature, not even made out of flesh but out of wet biscuit dough, she always looks like the bones are dis-solving in her.[188]

It is interesting that the dog image applies to two other characters in the play who are also essentially parasites: Bill, who has made a career of living off women like Leona and who makes a sound like a panting dog as Violet fondles him

[186] Ibid., p. 54; "Confessional," p. 185.

[187] Ibid., p. 22; "Confessional," p. 156.

[188] Ibid., pp. 20-21; "Confessional, pp. 154-155.

under the table,[189] and Steve, who says in his soliloquy that his taking up with Violet is like a dog running for a bone:

> I guess Violet's a pig, all right, and I ought to be ashamed to go around with her. But a man. . . can't be choosy. Nope, he has to be satisfied with the Goddam scraps in this world, and Violet's one of those scraps. She's a pitiful scrap, but. . . Oh, my life, my miserable, cheap life! It's like a bone thrown to a dog! I'm the dog, she's the bone. . . .Life!. . .Throw it to a dog. I'm not a dog, I don't want it. . . .[190]

None of the characters except, perhaps, Leona, wants his life, because each life is nothing but corruption. As Leona says, "Everyone needs! One beautiful thing! In the course of a lifetime! To save the heart from. . .CORRUPTION!. . .Without one beautiful thing in the course of a lifetime, it's all death-time."[191] She intimates that the memory of her dead brother, whose death-day (the anniversary of the day he died) she is celebrating, is the beautiful thing in her life; yet moments later she suggests, unconsciously, that everything in the society is corrupted with her announcement that "I heard on

[189] Ibid., p. 52; "Confessional," p. 153.

[190] Ibid., pp. 28-29; "Confessional," pp. 162-163.

[191] Ibid., p. 34; "Confessional," p. 168.

TV that the Food Administration found insect and rodent parts in some hot dogs sold lately."[192] However, her courage at facing life is evident in her soliloquy; she is the antithesis of the other characters who have given up on life, even though she harbors fears and is less confident than her braggadocio would suggest:

> . . .All at once, something wonderful happens. All the past disappointments in people I left behind me, just disappear, evaporate from my mind, and I just remember the good things, such as their sleeping faces, and. . .Life! Life! I never just said, "Oh, well," I've always said "Life!" to life, like a song to God, too, because I've lived in my lifetime and not been afraid of. . .changes. . .[193]

Unlike the other characters, Leona will not allow herself to drift along through time and life. Yet, ironically, she is a drifter too as she travels from place to place in her trailer house on wheels.

The primitive energy that Leona has comes through much clearer in the character of Chicken in Kingdom of Earth. The play, retitled The Seven Descents of Myrtle, is almost a parody of the decaying Old South, complete with the eternal triangle:

[192] Ibid., p. 35; "Confessional," p. 168.

[193] Ibid., p. 55; "Confessional," p. 186.

the tubercular brother Lot, a transvestite who represents the sickly royal blood of the past; the illegitimate, partly Black Chicken, who represents the new vigor of the present which will inherit the earth; and the dumb-blonde sexpot Myrtle who is used and abused by both. The animal images spring naturally from the colloquial speech of the two brothers and Lot's new wife, Myrtle, former burlesque dancer and present piece of white trash. Most of the images serve to describe the earthy vigor of Chicken, who got his name from sitting a previous flood out on the roof with the chickens and subsisting by biting off their heads and drinking their blood.[194] Frequently Chicken is compared to an animal: he cocks his head like an animal at a warning sound,[195] he leans stiffly over to look out and listen like a crouched animal,[196] and he walks so that the other two characters do not know if his footsteps are human or animal.[197] Twice Myrtle calls him an animal,[198] perhaps

[194]Tennessee Williams, Kingdom of Earth (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 2.

[195]Ibid., p. 3.

[196]Ibid., p. 5.

[197]Ibid., p. 17.

198 Ibid., pp. 38, 65.

because he frequently gives her a wolfish grin, his eyes appraising her body.[199] His rapacious, sexual hunger could only be described as wolfish. Myrtle also calls him a bull of a man,[200] suggesting his sheer physical power and sexual energy. Chicken calls himself a wood's-colt[201] to describe his bastardy and racially mixed parentage; indeed, he snorts "like a wild horse"[202] when Lot tells Myrtle that he and Chicken had very different mothers. (Chicken must resemble his father, for he mentions that he died "howling like a wild beast,"[203] and that he had "the taste of a hawg."[204]) Chicken's vicious and brooding behavior towards Lot is motivated by jealousy--Lot calls it "the black bird of jealousy" eating at his heart[205] --of his legal parentage and his ownership of the decaying plantation, which Williams names Raven Roost as a reminder of this black bird[206] (Lot's last name is Ravenstock, and, indeed,

[199] Ibid., pp. 27, 37, 71-72.

[200] Ibid., p. 54.

[201] Ibid., pp. 75-76.

[202] Ibid., p. 17.

[203] Ibid., p. 7.

[204] Ibid., p. 41.

[205] Ibid., p. 24.

[206] Ibid., p. 93.

he owns all the stock to the place). Chicken complains that he was worked as a slave, fed no better than slops in the trough of a sow,[207] and treated like "a dawg that nobody owns and owns nothing. Ask any dawg on a road or a street, any dawg, any road, any street. . .ask any dawg in the street. . ."[208] This comparison to a dog is emphasized when Myrtle hears Chicken in the kitchen and thinks he is a dog.[209] Chicken, then is a beast of the earth, a realist who will inherit the kingdom of earth.

Myrtle, also of the earth--and she descends even further to earth as the play progresses--is also described as an animal; not as the strong animal like Chicken, but as the helpless little animal, dependent on others for security and well-being. Both Lot and Myrtle refer to her as a small animal who needs a home of its own.[210] She is like the cat which Chicken has on the place, although ironically she is allergic to cats:

> MYRTLE: I got that allergy thing. . .I wint to a Memphis doctor who gave me the allergy tests and guess what he found out, he found out I was living

[207] Ibid., p. 92.

[208] Ibid., pp. 100-101.

[209] Ibid., p. 10.

[210] Ibid., pp. 8, 13.

> with a cat and had a allergy to it. Yes, I had a cat I was real, real fond of, cat named Fluffy. Well, they discovered this cat, she had a allergy to me. I had to git rid of Fluffy, it was her or me. First I give her a great big head of catfish, which was her favorite food. Like the last supper of the condemned. Then chloroformed her. Poor Fluffy. I was so attached to her and her to me.--I wept a bucket full of tears that night!. . .From the way I suffer from my asthma tonight, I'm willing to bet that there's a cat somewhere on this place. CHICKEN: I got a cat.[211]

Myrtle, like the cat, is dependent on someone stronger to take care of her. She realizes this, and that is why she is so frightened when she thinks the cat is drowning because Chicken drops it in the flooded cellar. In fact, Chicken playfully tries to push her in too as she searches for the cat. Later, when Chicken puts on his rubber boots and goes down to the basement to fetch the cat, Myrtle's identity with it is made even clearer. Chicken sadistically enjoys frightening Myrtle--and the cat--howling with laughter and calling "pussy, pussy, pussy?" as he rescues the yowling cat from the flood.[212] (Williams surely intends the sexual connotation here.) Myrtle's only chance of rescue from the impending flood

[211] Ibid., p. 57.

[212] Ibid., pp. 63-64.

which rages outside the farmhouse is by submitting to Chicken's demands. Chicken himself has stated that "I'd sooner be caught in my house by ten foot of water than caught in the mud on a road. . .an' drown like kittens tied in a sack with rocks and thrown in the river."[213] It is interesting that after he has forced Myrtle to sign the paper giving the plantation to him, Chicken behaves much more kindly to Myrtle. This shift in attitude is symbolized by putting the cat in the parlor instead of in the flooded basement when Myrtle has another asthma attack; she is "gasping like a fish out of water" at his suggestion that she will drown unless he hauls her up to the roof with him.[214]

Death images surround the character of Lot. Chicken says, "I bet there's a buzzard circlin' over the house, since you got here."[215] The raven as a symbol of death applies to him--Lot Ravenstock. Myrtle is unaware that he is dying, and Chicken takes sadistic delight in telling her: Yeah, Lot baby bleeds. He bleeds like a chicken with its head chopped off. I'm

[213] Ibid., p. 2.

[214] Ibid., p. 83.

[215] Ibid., p. 24.

Chicken, he's headless Chicken. . . .[216] The contrast between the two, physically, sexually, and as symbols of the civilized, delicate past compared to the earthy, brutish present, is obvious. Lot is wounded by life as the South has been wounded by its history. It is diseased, and if it is not destroyed by disease, it will be destroyed by the flood, the flood of time.

The simpler, more primitive energies will inherit the earth. Chicken will get what he wants. Myrtle, by yielding to her primitive sex drives, can save herself, too. It is clear from the beginning that Myrtle and Chicken are natural sex-mates. It is unbelievable to Chicken that Lot and Myrtle are married; that fact "makes no more sense than if you [Lot] told me you licked TB and've got the strength of a mule team."[217] He recognizes from the first that she is more suited to him. We are prepared for her quick change of affections when she describes her feelings toward Lot: "the love bug hit me, cupid's arrow shot a bull's eye in my heart."[218] Such devotion is not meant to last long. Instead, she is attracted to Chicken

[216] Ibid., p. 35.

[217] Ibid., p. 28.

[218] Ibid., p. 32.

from the beginning. She keeps leaving Lot in the bedroom to come down to Chicken; she is horrified by him, but she cannot stay away from him. She says she wants to go down because she smells the fried potatoes and is hungry, but Lot recognizes her real hunger: "If you didn't smell fried potatoes you'd smell Chicken."[219] Her primitive drives--desire for sex and escape from danger--lead her to Chicken. The play moves along in praise of the omnipotence of sex while bullfrogs and crickets make their forlorn and desultory comments;[220] until finally, as Chicken exultantly looks over the land that is now his and commands the woman that is now his to peel the potatoes, he shouts: "Sing it out, frogs and crickets, Chicken is King!"[221] The earth, the realm of frogs and crickets, has won over heaven; the beastly will triumph over the spiritual. Mention of the frog, symbol of rainfall and herald of fertility and creation, and the cricket, symbol of hearth, home and good luck, promises a satisfactory future for Chicken and Myrtle.

The future is not so bright for Mrs. Goforth in The Milk

[219] Ibid., p. 45.

[220] Ibid., p. 37.

[221] Ibid., p. 111.

Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore. She is dying. Her symbol is the griffin, a device attached to the banner which the stage assistants raise to fly over Mrs. Goforth's mountain. "The griffin is staring at death," says stage assistant two, "and trying to outstare it."[222] The griffin is a mythical beast with a lion's body and the wings and head of an eagle. It is thus composed of the most royal of beasts and birds, which are in themselves the symbols of both dominion and destruction. Like Mrs. Goforth, and--as we shall see--like Christopher Flanders, the symbolic Christ-bearer[223] who stumbles up the path to her villa with his weighty pack, the griffin is an ambivalent symbol, representing both Christ and anti-Christ at once. The various parts of this mythical monster struggle against one another, so it appears at once as executioner and victim.[224] Dante, inspired by frequent comparisons of Christ to a lion because he reigns and has great strength and to an

[222]Tennessee Williams, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 103.

[223]St. Christopher was said to have carried a child across a river, and as he did, the child became Jesus, who in turn carried the sins of the world.

[224]Cirlot, pp. 128, 134.

eagle because, after the Resurrection, he ascended to heaven, made the griffin a symbol of Christ. The griffin, its eagle portion golden, its lion portion white mixed with red in order to signify Christ's human nature, draws a burnished two-sheel chariot, a symbol of the church, in a triumphal procession. But a medieval Italian bestiary says the creature stands for the Devil, and in sculpture it is frequently a symbol of the Devil, probably because of its fabled ability to carry off animals at one swoop of its talons.[225] The griffin was also the emblem of Knowledge in the medieval cycle of the virtues and vices; the monster, so medieval writers declared, had a passion for discovering and guarding gold.[226] It also guarded temples; and it stands beside the Tree of life, guarding the road to salvation.[227] With the history of the griffin in mind, it becomes a perfect symbol for the ambiguous religious allegory of the temptation of Christ in The Milk Train. In the

[225]Borges, p. 116.

[226]Rowland, p. 87. She comments that this trait brought it into disrepute during the Renaissance, when it came to be a symbol of the usurer.

[227]Cirlot, p. 128.

first lines of the play Williams indicates that his allegory, however, is not in the spiritual realm at all, but wholly human: "a golden griffin. . .A mythological monster, half lion, and half eagle. . . .And completely human. . . .Yes, wholly and completely human, that's true."[228] If The Milk Train is an allegory on man's need for someone or something to mean God to him, Williams ironically suggests that our Christ figures may just as easily be anti-Christ, our deities just as easily human. Chris Flanders's self-appointed destiny is to represent God to elderly ladies of wealth on the brink of death. Yet his life is an ironic parallel to Christ's. As Francis Kunkel suggests in "Tennessee Williams and the Death of God,"

> Williams' is a literature of decadence. By decadence I mean the ambivalence of attraction and repulsion; the nexus of opposites, the controvertibility of extremes; an upside-downness, an inside-outness--as well as other forms of inversion. This distorting mirror world of Williams exhibits the following traits: the Creator is equated with the lowliest of created things; innocence is equated with evil; life is equated with death; the soul is equated with the body.[229]

[228] Milk Train, p. 5.

[229] Francis L. Kunkel, "Tennessee Williams and the Death of God," Commonweal, LXXXVII (February 23, 1968), 615.

Certainly equating Chris Flanders's appearance on the mountain of Italy's Divina Costiera (Divine Coast) with the temptation of Christ on the mountain is equating creature with Creator. Christ's forty day fast in the wilderness preceding the temptation is reduced to four days of hunger for Chris. The witch of Capri promises to promote him as an artist and lay the wealth of Capri at his feet; Mrs. Goforth asks him, "Can you walk on water?" He is a narcissistic gigolo, the world's most despicable professional lover, become a symbol for Christ, the world's most pure amateur lover; promiscuous copulation is given religious significance and seen as the salvation for the woman Chris visits as the Angel of Death. He equates death with life as he helps the old man out in the water to drown--leading him to death is the way he rescues the man. As the Death Angel, he helps the old women to die by giving them the notion that life is fulfilled in death, that death has greater dignity than life: "Death is one moment," he says, "and life is so many of them."[230] Thus, Chris, who brings both salvation and death up the road, who symbolizes both Christ and anti-Christ, is the griffin incarnate. In addition, Mrs. Goforth resembles

[230]Milk Train, p. 84.

the griffin, constantly guarding her gold, domineering and destroying, yet being destroyed in the process. In mythology, the griffin either tears a man to pieces or carries him to its nest. In The Milk Train we are left with the ambivalence: Does Mrs. Goforth tear Chris to pieces or carry him to her nest? Does Chris tear Mrs. Goforth to pieces or carry her to his nest? Which is executioner and which is victim? Like the griffin, they struggle against each other to their own destruction. This self-destroying aspect of the griffin is seen by Mrs. Goforth when she describes the sun as "that angry old lion."[231] She sees the sun as time, the angry enemy which is devouring her life; the destructive powers of both sun and lion are evident, and we can readily picture the sun consuming itself. This view adds to the ironic texture of the play, for usually the lion and sun are linked as symbols of life. Mrs. Goforth, "with all that fierce life in her,"[232] is angrily consuming herself towards death. The ambivalence of the griffin as life/death symbol is emphasized when the stage assistants comment that "It's Reveille always, Taps never, for the gold

[231] Ibid., pp. 11, 84-85.

[232] Ibid., p. 117.

griffin."[233] Another reference to Mrs. Goforth as griffin might be intended when she says that a coin has two sides--an eagle on one, something else on the other. Chris replies, "Yes, something else, usually some elderly potentate's profile,"[234] alluding to Mrs. Goforth herself. The griffin as a symbol of the polarity of the universe, the "controvertibility of extremes" which is stronger than any other force, is stated when Mrs. Goforth asks, "Griffin? What's a griffin?" And Chris replies, "A force in life that's almost stronger than death. [He springs up and turns to the booming sea.] The sea's full of white race horses today. . . ."[235]

It is interesting that other images besides the griffin apply to both Mrs. Goforth and Chris. The horse image, applied to the sea in the quotation above, applies to both the characters and, as the white horse, is a symbol of death. Mrs. Goforth's former beauty had been so great that she had gone to a costume ball as Lady Godiva, astride a white horse, and with her "animal instinct--a very valuable asset"[236] had

[233] Ibid.

[234] Ibid., p. 82.

[235] Ibid., p. 66.

[236] Ibid., p. 34.

smelled the crash of 1929 coming. Now, however, "I'm a little run down, like a race horse that's been entered in just one race too many, even for me. . ."[237] Like Celeste of "The Mutilated," she ridicules women her age, or younger, who have "got breasts that look like a couple of mules hanging their heads over the top rail of a fence."[238] She says that Chris must have the back of a dray horse to haul his sack full of metalsmith's tools up the mountain,[239] especially since he is no chicken--almost 35 years old (again, Chris is a fallen Christ, come after the crucifixion, too late to catch the milk train).

Dogs and cats, as well as horses, represent both protagonists. When Chris first comes up the path, Mrs. Goforth's watchdogs attack him.[240] Later, when the two characters are talking of this incident, Mrs. Goforth mentions that the Italian words for these wild dogs is lupos, which means wolves; she also tried to absolve herself of any responsibility for his injuries

[237]Ibid., p. 66.

[238]Ibid., p. 65.

[239]Ibid., p. 35.

[240]Ibid., pp. 12-13.

from the dogs by lying that she had put up beware signs.[241] The witch of Capri says that some people in her age bracket--senior citizens--would set dogs on Flanders if he entered their grounds because he arrives just before the undertaker.[242] Rudy, Mrs. Goforth's cruel watchman, is equated with the dogs--he tends them and uses them to threaten any guest he does not like. At one point, he wakes up the dogs and drives a stick into Chris's stomach (a mock crucifixion?), but Blackie, the secretary who is sympathetic to Chris, intervenes, calling Rudy a drunk gorilla.[243] Later she calls Rudy a dog.[244] All these images represent the rapacious and watchful Mrs. Goforth; she would have sex with Chris eagerly, but she will not share one crust of bread with him as she carefully guards her treasure. These traits are affirmation of the same characteristics found in the griffin. Chris is also likened to a dog, as he shakes his head like a spaniel when he comes still wet from the bath.[245] Later, Mrs. Goforth asks him why he did not just grab some of

[241] Ibid., pp. 61-62.

[242] Ibid., p. 47.

[243] Ibid., p. 53.

[244] Ibid., p. 62.

[245] Ibid., p. 25.

her food and run, and he replies, "Like a dog grabs a bone? . . .the fighting style of dogs is not my style."[246] Near the end of the play Mrs. Goforth makes a telling remark about dogs which gives us a key to her character: she says she trusts nobody human, just dogs--"All except poodles, I never trusted a poodle. . ."[247] Mrs. Goforth makes two comments about cats as well: she says she thinks black cats are as lucky as white cats and that she is only against the human cats of this world, of which there is no small number;[248] and she tells Chris, "You purr at me like a cat, now, but a cat will purr at you one minute and scratch your eyes out the next."[249] Both comments emphasize the dual nature of the universe--black and white, gentle and violent--which is the theme here. Chris illustrates man's relationship to God with an extended metaphor about kittens and puppies:

> Have you ever seen how two little animals sleep together, a pair of kittens or puppies? All day

[246] Ibid., pp. 82-83.

[247] Ibid., p. 97.

[248] Ibid., p. 70.

[249] Ibid., p. 90.

> they seem so secure in the house of their master, but at night, when they sleep, they don't seem sure of their owner's true care for them. Then they draw close together, they curl up against each other, and now and then, if you watch them, you notice they nudge each other a little with their heads or their paws, exchange little signals between them. The signals mean: we're not in danger. . .sleep: we're close: it's safe here. Their owner's house is never a sure protection, a reliable shelter. Everything going on in it is mysterious to them and no matter how hard they try to please, how do they know if they please? They hear so many sounds, voices, and see so many things they can't comprehend. . . .We bark and jump around and try to--be--pleasingly playful in this big mysterious house but--in our hearts we're all very frightened of it. . . .[250]

This statement might be Chris's credo, his belief in the efficacy of union, probably sexual union, since it is a coming together in the night.

There are also several images of the sea--and of sea animals. The sea, like the sun, is an elemental symbol of both life and destruction, and Chris repeatedly calls attention to it by commenting on its booming sound (the film version of the play was entitled Boom). Several times Mrs. Goforth and the witch mention that the sea is full of Medusas, those jellyfish that sting.[251] Mrs. Goforth says, "Capri's

[250] Ibid., pp. 73-74.

[251] Ibid., pp. 42, 77.

turned into a nest of vipers, Connie--and the sea is full of Medusas? Mmm. The Medusas are spawned by the bitches."[252] This image probably serves to link the women more closely to Satan--as serpent--tempters of the "innocent" Chris. The allusion to the Medusa coincides with several other allusions to classical literature and the classical world in this play. Chris, rhapsodizing on the sea as the cradle of civilization, calls its connecting river, the Nile, "that old water snake."[253] He seems to be preaching the wisdom of the ancient world, but Mrs. Goforth, who has a Viking spirit of life, will have none of it:

> I've been on the Nile. No message. . . .No message. Rode up to [the pyramids] on a camel so I could say I'd done the whole bit. . .No message, except you can get seasick on a camel. Yep, you can get mighty seasick on the hump of a camel. . . .[254]

She is scoffing at the religion he brings. Her mention of the camel's hump may also bring to mind sexual activity. According to Rowland, the camel's most conspicuous role was sexual:

[252] Ibid., p. 44.

[253] Ibid., p. 94.

[254] Ibid.

"it was a medieval nymphomaniac."[255] Thus the camel represents Mrs. Goforth, who views sex as mere copulation rather than as the salvation of the world as Chris does. He desires to return to an earlier way of life, to live in the shack on the beach and exist on shellfish--*frutti di mare*. He would need no money, just as the fish in the sea need none.[256] On the other hand, Mrs. Goforth and the witch of Capri exist on such exotic things as sheep-embryo-plantations, gull's eggs, and *dentice freddo*.[257]

Williams has said the play is about the death of a clown, and many of the animal images in Mrs. Goforth's mouth are humorous, often puns; others are trite clichés, such as accusing Chris of playing possum. She calls Chris her Trojan horse guest, because he arrived without invitation.[258] She puns on leper and leopard, much like the pun on aureole and oriole in "A Perfect Analysis Given by a Parrot." She tells of a chorus girl she knew in the Follies who, when she would show up with

[255]Rowland, p. 49.

[256]Williams, *Milk Train*, p. 112.

[257]*Ibid*., p. 43.

[258]*Ibid*., p. 64.

circles under her eyes, would say, "The blackbirds kissed me last night," meaning she had been too busy to sleep that night, ho ho.[259] She tells of her fourth husband's red demon sports car, his fighting cock, which she put in his hands. Of her earlier husbands she says the first two were ugly as apes and the third resembled an ostrich.[260] She tells Chris she is going to talk turkey. "At least, I'm going to talk turkey. You can talk ducks and geese, but I am going to talk turkey, cold turkey."[261] In the conflict between her and Chris, she is the more vivid figure. Though she is dying and frightened of it, she appears stronger than the unfrightened but weak Chris, perhaps because his character is passive.

The death of society as we know it is pictured in "The Demolition Downtown." The destruction of tradition is symbolized by the blasting that continues throughout the piece. The two men, Mr. Lane and Mr. Kane, plan to escape the blasting by getting donkeys for transportation--mangy, old donkeys,[262]

[259] Ibid., p. 61.

[260] Ibid., p. 7.

[261] Ibid., p. 84.

[262] Tennessee Williams, "The Demolition Downtown," Esquire, LXXV (June, 1971), 124.

but the women, realizing that their children will survive "snug as bugs in their beds,"[263] even to the destruction of their parents, plan to go to the general, who has taken over, and his brother "The Panther" and offer their naked bodies to them, saying "Take me."[264] The donkey may represent stubbornness in refusing to accept the new order; or the ineffectual attempt of an escape to the mountains by the adults while the little girls sing the song of the new order: "We are crouching in the mountains where the mighty eagles fly, we are waiting in the caverns that are close up to the sky--"[265] The fierceness of the new regime is seen in the image of the panther, the crouching animal of the song, and the eagle. As the largest blast shakes the plaster from the ceiling, Mr. Lane and Mr. Kane

> charge in front door, panting like foxhounds in hot pursuit of--And dead on that cue, we hear the voices of Mrs. L. and Mrs. Kane singing loudly into the diminuendo of quick distance. Marching Song.
> We are crouching in the mountains / where the mighty eagles fly, / We are waiting in the caverns that / are close up to the sky, / But without a note of warning, with / no trumpet and no drum, / From the

[263] Ibid., p. 127.

[264] Ibid., p. 152.

[265] Ibid.

> peaks of the mountains, will / our hungry legions come, / AND OUR TRUTH WILL MAKE US STRONG![266]

The men have been emasculated by their pursuit of something that does not exist, or that has ceased to exist for them. They are no longer useful; as Mr. Lane has said earlier in the play, "Anxiety is the most useless feeling a person can feel."[267]

Anxiety of two couples is satirized in Period of Adjustment, Williams's only attempt at domestic comedy. The overly-neat plot concerns two marriages floundering, one after twenty-four hours, the other after five years. The marriage of Ralph and Dorothea Bates is breaking up because Ralph feels trapped. By allowing himself to settle for security rather than love, he married Dotty on the condition that her father, a prosperous businessman, will leave the dairy chain to him when he succumbs to his numerous serious ailments. Ralph is desperate not only because Mr. McGillicuddy--his father-in-law--refuses to die, but also because he is bored and disgusted with his job; he despises his in-laws for their interference, and he feels

[266] Ibid.

[267] Ibid., p. 126.

guilty that he does not love his wife. After five years, his guilt and frustrations come to a head. A flying hero in two wars, he feels "grounded" and dying of suffocation, so he decides to start afresh in a new job. Dorothea sees this as a rejection of her, knowing full well that her husband never loved her. And although the relationship is sexually gratifying to her, she leaves him.

The other couple, Isabel and George Haverstick, have been married one day, but due to George's brutal and clumsy attempts to make love to her, Isabel is terrified, and their marriage is as yet unconsummated. Both are afraid of sex, he due to fear of failure, she due to an overprotective father. In addition, both are jobless, due to incompetence at their jobs--Isabel was a nurse who fainted at the sight of blood, George a mechanic whose hands shook so that he could not even hold his tools. (The familiar "cripple" of Williamsian drama appears in George, who has the shakes and cannot sleep under any kind of sedation less than enough to knock an elephant out [p. 12].) A war buddy of Ralph, George also feels trapped in his job and his life, and longs to return to the time when he was needed and competent, when he and Ralph were war heroes. Thus, both men, in their desire to regain the past, and Isabel, in her simplistic

desire for the "sweet" little bungalow and the American dream, are romantics.[268]

This romanticism is suggested by the key animal image in the play, "the Texas longhorn."[269] George suggests that he and Ralph go to Texas and raise longhorns and buffalo--beasts that are noble and almost extinct, but of no practical value. George's dream is that they return to the frontiers of old and live the life of individuals:

> GEORGE: . . ."The Last Stand of the Texas Longhorn, a Dignified Beast! We breed cattle for TV Westerns." We breed us some buffalo, too. The buffalo is also a dignified beast, almost extinct, only thirty thousand head of the buffalo left in this land. We'll increase that number by a sizable fraction. Hell, we could double that number befo' we--
> RALPH: Hang up our boots an' saddles under the--dignified sky of West Texas?
> GEORGE: [with feeling]: There is dignity in that sky! There's dignity in the agrarian, the pastoral--way of--existence! A dignity too long lost out of the--American dream--[270]

[268]Each of the three has a romantic dream: George to raise cattle, Ralph to be an astronaut, Isabel to sacrifice all and be a heroic nurse serving a handsome doctor. She dreams she helps plague victims and contracts their disease by getting little silver fish scales on her hands (p. 27).

[269]The longhorn image is very similar to the unicorn image used in The Glass Menagerie. Both are romantic, individual, extinct. Both have the phallic horn symbol.

[270]Tennessee Williams, Period of Adjustment (New York: New Directions, 1960), pp. 70-71.

At first the vision does not appeal to Ralph, who instead has fantasies about the future--being the first man in a moon rocket, the Adam on a star in a different galaxy, colonizing and fertilizing.[271] George's sentimentality is immediately satirized as Ralph injects a more realistic note with his hope that one of those historical Longhorns does not gore him while he is contemplating the dignified West Texas pasture. This cynical strain runs all through their plans to start a new life in Texas. After all, the purpose of breeding Longhorns is not to return to the simple, agrarian, individualistic way of life so much as to rent them to film studios for use in TV Westerns. Thus, the romantic life becomes confused with the materialistic, artificial, mass-produced life from which the two men are trying to escape. In fact, as one of George's television Westerns, with the hero unhitching the horses and stempeding the cattle, blares out against the sound of Christmas eve carolers, George comments, "Will you look at that? A Western on Christmas eve, even! It's a goddam NATIONAL OBSESSIONAL." And Ralph replies, "Yep, a national homesickness in the American heart for the old wild frontiers with the yelping redskins and

[271] Ibid., p. 73.

the covered wagons on fire and--"[272] But he agrees to go along with George, and the play closes with each man telling his wife that they plan to buy ranchland in San Antonio and raise cattle in an attempt to make the American dream come true.[273]

The entire play satirizes what passes for the good life in America--from owning a cute Spanish suburban house in a development sinking into a cavern to owning a cute little dog. The malignant effect of money--and the American drive for ownership and consumerism--is represented by the actions of Dorothea's parents, who enter the house ready to take all the Christmas presents (they have commercialized, and thus profaned, the holiday) and all the household effects. The beaver coat, which Ralph got Dorothea for Christmas, is a symbol of this attitude. Isabel takes one look and says she knows Ralph loves Dotty because of the gift.[274] Mr. McGillicuddy showed the same desire for money when he placed a penny under Dorothea's statue of the Infant of Prague to ensure prosperity, thus profaning the sacred.[275] The McGillicuddys enter like "a

[272] Ibid., pp. 78-79.

[273] Ibid., pp. 112-113.

[274] Ibid., p. 65.

[275] Ibid., p. 53.

pair of old bulls."[276] They lack the dignity of the Longhorns, exhibiting only the disgusting nature of the beast. George suggests this perversion of character by calling Mr. McGillicuddy "a big male cow, a spiritual male cow."[277]

Also in contrast to the Longhorn is the Bates's pet dog, which Ralph ironically calls his dignified beast: "A constant frigidaire pointer. Points at the Westinghouse Frij an' whines for a handout whenever you enter the kitchen."[278] He sees what is worst in his life in the dog--his sissy son,[279] his demanding wife, his grasping in-laws. Yet there is an implied rejection of his in-laws in getting the dog--because they are cat-lovers. He tells George: "I didn't want this kind of a dawg, either. I wanted a Doberman pinscher, a dawg with some guts, not a whiner! But she wanted a poodle and this flop-eared sad sack of a spaniel was a compromise which turned out to be worse'n a poodle, ha, ha. . . ."[280] Isabel uses the

[276] Ibid., p. 89.

[277] Ibid., p. 97.

[278] Ibid., p. 76.

[279] The image of the hobby horse re-appears as a sexual symbol in this play, when Ralph says his sissy son would probably ride it side-saddle.

[280] Williams, Period, p. 39.

dog as an excuse to leave the house to take it for a walk, thus giving the two men a chance to talk; she overhears George say to Ralph, "I know of two animals that want out and one of them ain't no dawg!" And as they leave, the dog is barking at something outside.[281] Isabel professes to like dogs, calling the spaniel "a sweet animal"; likewise, Dorothea says that she loves animals, horses, spaniels, and longhorns.[282] Yet we feel that both women say this because it is expected, much as they agree to going to Texas. It is more pleasant to agree to get through the night; perhaps they can change their husbands' minds later.

Williams is able to create a comedy about the emptiness of synthetic American domesticity by reducing the characters in stature and their problems in intensity. One technique of doing this is through the friendly, familiar dialogue between Ralph and George, frequently using animal images. Ralph calls George an "old Texas jack rabbit"[283] several times, and George greets Ralph with, "How'sa young squirrel? Ha ha!"[284] They

[281] Ibid., p. 66.

[282] Ibid., pp. 113, 115.

[283] Ibid., p. 8, 38, 66.

[284] Ibid., p. 37.

catch each other in an affectionate bear hug (p. 66), and George continues the male greetings with, "I'm the son of a camel, ha ha! My mother was a camel with two humps, a double hump--dromedary! Ha ha ha!"[285] The reference to sex is inescapable, and from this greeting on, the two men talk of sex as if it is the major fact in their lives. Perhaps Williams has pin-pointed the American preoccupation with sex in the satire. This preoccupation is but a symptom of their larger problems--they need to escape the boredom, guilt, and frustration in their lives. They long for freedom. When Ralph finally gets George to talk about his fear of impotence, George evades the subject, saying, "Look! We're both free now. Like two birds,"[286] and Mr. McGillicuddy calls them birds of a feather (p. 94). But George is merely deluding himself, since the freedom he is speaking of exists only in his fantasies of a past that never was.

Garden District is the title given to two plays presented together in 1958: "Something Unspoken," a short dialog which implies a lesbian relationship between a wealthy Southern

[285] Ibid.

[286] Ibid., p. 87.

spinster who chases glory as an officer in the Daughters of the Confederacy and her quiet, lackluster secretary who has "turned grey the color of a cobweb;"[287] and "Suddenly Last Summer," a controlled play which depends solely on verbal imagery to create its superb tension and horror. The play, which Benjamin Nelson has called "the most perfectly realized play [Williams] has ever written,"[288] places violent animal images against a jungle-garden background which is ever-present. The garden, which was created by Sebastian, gives us an image of the man's own world view:

> The interior is blended with a fantastic garden which is more like a tropical jungle, or forest, in the prehistoric age. . .when living creatures had flippers turning to limbs and scales to skin. The colors of this jungle-garden are violent, especially since it is steaming with heat after rain. There are massive tree-flowers that suggest organs of a body, torn out, still glistening with undried blood; there are harsh cries and sibilant hissings and thrashing sounds in the garden as if it were inhabited by beasts, serpents and birds, all of savage nature. . .[289]

[287]Tennessee Williams, "Something Unspoken," Twenty-Seven Wagons Full of Cotton, p. 234. The play was first published in this volume in 1945 and was selected to complete a full evening with the short "Suddenly Last Summer," the more important work of the two.

[288]Nelson, p. 244.

[289]Tennessee Williams, "Suddenly Last Summer," The Theatre of Tennessee Williams, Vol. III (New York: New Directions, 1971), p. 349.

The garden, then, is a metaphor for Sebastian and for the cruel world he envisions and by which he is devoured.[290] The cannibalism at the end of the play is prefigured by the actions of the carnivorous plants and animals in the garden: Sebastian had a Venus's-Flytrap, and he provided it with fruit flies flown in at great expense from a Florida lab that used the flies for experiments in genetics.[291] The cannibalistic nature of each of the personalities is repeatedly punctuated by ominous bird cries from the jungle. For example, when Catherine's brother George attempts to stop her story about the events of last summer by telling her that they will not inherit anything from the rich Mrs. Venable if she continues in it, she stares at his back a moment, then laughs wildly, and jungle birds scream in the garden (p. 381). George and his mother let their greed eat away at Catherine; they would allow her to

[290]The cannibalism theme has been expressed in earlier work. D. H. Lawrence makes a speech in "I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix" about the harlot of darkness devouring the blond god of the sun. Anthony Burns's death in "Desire and the Black Masseur" is parallel to Sebastian's death. Burns directly sought atonement; Catherine says that Sebastian was "completing--a sort of--image--he had of himself as a sort of--sacrifice to a--terrible sort of a--" (p. 397).

[291]Williams, "Suddenly," p. 350.

be mentally cannibalized for a share of Sebastian's estate. Mrs. Venable is trying to swallow up the truth about her son by destroying Catherine's mind with a lobotomy. She is trying to eat at Catherine to satisfy her own vanity and possessiveness; the sounds in the garden become "loud with the sounds of its feathered and scaled inhabitants" when Mrs. Venable accuses Catherine of lying (p. 393). When Catherine says that Sebastian could no longer use his mother after the stroke disfigured her face, the sounds of the jungle-garden become ominous, but not loud (p. 396). The sounds here not only represent Mrs. Venable's psychological cannibalism of Catherine, but also Sebastian's cannibalism of both Catherine and his mother. (Even Dr. Cukrowicz is tempted in the garden by the woman Mrs. Venable to sacrifice knowledge of the truth for a foundation grant for his hospital from Sebastian's estate.)

The cannibalism motif is further emphasized when Mrs. Venable tells of Sebastian's search for God and his discovery of Him on a volcanic island in the Encantadas. She and Sebastian remained off-shore in a schooner and watched the spectacle of the giant sea turtles crawling out of the sea to lay their eggs on the beach.

> MRS. VENABLE:. . .Once a year the female of the sea turtle crawls up out of the equatorial sea onto the blazing sand-beach of a volcanic island to dig a pit in the sand and deposit her eggs in the sand pits, and when it's finished the exhausted female turtle crawls back to the sea half dead. She never sees her offspring, but we did. Sebastian knew exactly when the sea turtle eggs would be hatched out and we returned in time for it. . . .Terrible Encantadas, those heaps of extinct volcanos, in time to witness the hatching of the sea turtles and their desperate flight to the sea! /There is a sound of harsh bird-cries in the air. She looks up./--The narrow beach, the color of caviar, was all in motion! But the sky was in motion, too. . . .--Full of flesh-eating birds and the noise of the birds, the horrible savage cries of the--. . . .
> Over the narrow black beach of the Encantadas as the just-hatched sea turtles scrambled out of the sand pits and started their race to the sea. . . .To escape the flesh-eating birds that made the sky almost as black as the beach! /She gazes up again: we hear the wild, ravenous, harsh cries of the birds. The sound comes in rhythmic waves like a savage chant./ And the sand all alive, all alive, as the hatched sea-turtles made their dash for the sea, while the birds hovered and swooped to attack and hovered and--swooped to attack! They were diving down on the hatched sea turtles, turning them over to expose their soft undersides, tearing the undersides open and rending and eating their flesh. Sebastian guessed that possibily only a hundredth of one per cent of their number would escape to the sea. . . .[290]

She goes on to say that Sebastian was looking for God, a clear image of God, and found it in this violent spectacle; thus he views the universe as cruel and deterministic. This

[290] Ibid., pp. 355-356.

deterministic view leads to what Signi Falk calls his "moral paralysis," his inability to take any action about anything.[291] This view also leads him to become a primitive sacrifice to this cruel carnivorous God, and at his death the image of flesh-eating birds appears again, this time as flocks of featherless sparrows:

> There were naked children along the beach, a band of frightfully thin and dark naked children that looked like a flock of plucked birds, and they would come darting up to the barbed wire fence as if blown there by the wind, the hot white wind from the sea, all crying out, 'Pan, pan, pan!'. . . The word for bread, and they made gobbling noises with their little black mouths stuffing their little black fists to their mouths and making those gobbling noises, with frightful grins.'[292]

As Sebastian tries to flee, finally taking some action, which Catherine believes was his fatal error, the street is blinding white, "white hot, a blazing white hot. . . .As if a huge white bone had caught on fire in the sky and blazed so bright it was white and turned the sky and everything under the sky

[291]Falk, pp. 152-153. In "Desire and the Black Masseur" the same idea is expressed: "So by surprise is a man's desire discovered, and once discovered, the only need is surrender. . ." (p. 90).

[292]Williams, "Suddenly," p. 415.

white with it!"[293] The light suggests not only the intensity of the situation, but also purity or purification through the bright white of truth. Sebastian has seen what he considers to be the truth of the universe in the spectacle of the sea turtles and the birds; he has been freed from the sheltered existence with his mother which kept his life ordered, ascetic, and unaware of the evil in his nature. Her presence had kept destruction in abeyance. She herself says "A poet's vocation is something that rests on something as thin and fine as the web of a spider, Doctor. That's all that holds him <u>over</u>!--out of destruction." (p. 408). But Catherine was not able to keep the web from breaking. In the last summer he is free to create his final poem

> the only one which over the past twenty-five years he knows will be true: the poem of destruction and sacrifice to a savage God in a carnivorous universe . . . .Sebastian, the artist, has fully recognized his weakness, perversity and incompletion. . . .He knows that his poems had been lies just as his life had been a lie. . . .He feels the guilt for his brokenness and for the lie he has lived. He knows that he has used and consumed people all his life, and he almost unconsciously makes his final attempt to bring order out of the chaos of the universe by

[293] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 420.

> centralizing it into one definitive ritualistic act. It is to be a compensation. . . .a purification.[294]

His death in the blinding white of revealed truth is his fulfillment. He has been searching all over the world for God, and in the moment of his death, as in the sight of the turtles, he can meet his God head-on. One can face the truth, cruel as it is, as Sebastian and Catherine do;[295] or one can turn to a desired world of unreality and go mad, as Mrs. Venable does. Sebastian recognizes the evil in himself. His retribution is just--he is eaten by the evil he has fostered:

> The band of naked children pursued us up the steep white street in the sun that was like a great white bone of a giant beast that had caught on fire in the sky!. . . .--I screamed. I heard Sebastian scream, he screamed just once before this flock of black plucked little birds that pursued him and overtook him halfway up the white hill. . . . When we got back to where my Cousin Sebastian had

[294]Nelson, pp. 257-258. Nelson sees Sebastian's masochistic death as his final creation, his final poem, thus uniting the opposites of creation/destruction, pleasure/pain (p. 259).

[295]Richard Hayes views Catherine as the symbol of the artist in our time, victimized for telling the truth. He writes, "Nowhere else has Mr. Williams embodied. . .the shape of the destructive element, in no other work made so undistracted a confession of belief in the artist's lyric vocation, his impotence in the flow of experience." Commonweal, LXVIII (May 30, 1958), 232-233. Catherine herself says, "I know its a hideous story but it's a true story of our time and the world we live in and what did truly happen. . . ."(p. 382).

> disappeared in the flock of featherless little black sparrows, he--he was lying naked as they had been naked against a white wall, and. . . .--They had devoured parts of him. . . .they had torn bits of him away and stuffed them into those gobbling fierce little empty black mouths of theirs.[296]

This is a fitting end for a man who looked at people as if they were items on a menu. He is finally naked--open, honest--against the truth about his life. He, and Catherine, are able to face that truth; Mrs. Venable would like to escape the cruelty of truth. In a passage which combines the carnivorous bird image with an image of a sweetly singing bird, she speaks almost as if she would desire a lobotomy:

> Oh, but what a blessing to them [lobotomy subjects], Doctor, to be just peaceful. . . .[A bird sings sweetly in the garden.] After all that horror, after those nightmares: just to be able to lift up their eyes and see--a sky not as black with savage, devouring birds as the sky that we saw in the Encantadas, Doctor.[297]

In this desire to escape the horrors of reality, Mrs. Venable is similar to Laura of The Glass Menagerie--and to many other Williamsian characters. Robert Rice draws together this

[296] Williams, "Suddenly," pp. 421-422.

[297] Ibid., pp. 366-367.

play and The Glass Menagerie in this lucid comment:

> The world is a jungle [Williams seems to say] and the alternative to living in it as a wild animal is to withdraw into one's own musings and fantasies, a menagerie where the animals are no longer threatening because they are made out of glass. Clearly, either choice is a sorry one, and just as clearly the everyday attempt of ordinary people to avoid the choice, to try to live a little in both the jungle and the glass menagerie, is sorry too; it is an eternal compromise and therefore eternal frustration. There is no way out.[298]

The single sweet bird song that occurred in the previous passage and occurs several other times in "Suddenly Last Summer" may be this attempt to create an illusory world; on the other hand, it may represent truth, or the artist's true vision. This paradox can be resolved when we consider Williams's view that the illusion which the artist creates can be more real, more true, than reality itself.[299] In any case, the image retains its ambivalence whenever it occurs in the play. For example, when Mrs. Venable lifts Sebastian's volume of poems, her face has the look of a visionary, an exalted religieuse, as if she is elevating the Host before the altar.

[298]Quoted in Tischler, pp. 258-259.

[299]See chapter seven for a more complete discussion of this view.

At the same instant a bird sings clearly and purely in the garden and the old lady seems to be almost young for a moment.[300] The bird's song emphasizes her illusions about her son and her relationship with him. The fact that she seems to be almost young further underscores this theme. At the same time, the purity and clarity of the bird's song suggests that there may be truth in Sebastian's poetry and even in the mother-son relationship. Later, during some business about an overly-bright cigarette lighter, Mrs. Venable comments, "'So shines a good deed in a naughty world,' Doctor--Sugar. . . . [Pause. A bird sings sweetly in the garden.]"[301] Again the bird song underscores the irony of this statement, for Mrs. Venable is just about to offer the doctor a grant for his cooperation in performing the lobotomy on Catherine. The same bird song appears twice when Catherine is telling hideous, but true, stories. As she describes the incident at Duelling Oaks, there is a pause and "the subdued, toneless bird-cries in the garden turn to a single bird song."[302] Since the remembrance of the affair is obviously painful to Catherine, we may take the

[300]Williams, "Suddenly," p. 353.

[301]Ibid., p. 365.

[302]Ibid., p. 398.

bird-song as a symbol of cruel truth. The same symbol occurs when, under the influence of truth serum, Catherine begins to tell about last summer: "There is a long pause. The raucous sounds in the garden fade into a bird song which is clear and sweet."[303] The theme of cruel but naked truth is implied by Sebastian's notebook in which he wrote all his poems, "The Blue Jay Notebook"[304] and by the way he openly used Catherine to procure for him that summer by insisting that she wear a transparent lisle swimsuit, "a scandal to the jay birds,"[305] which made her appear naked. In contrast is the veneer of respectability when Sebastian made her buy clothes and she became a peacock (p. 406). The ambivalence of the sweet bird symbol is one of the best touches in this artful work. By making the symbol apply to the two antagonists, Catherine and Mrs. Venable, the inside-outness, good-in-evil world of Williams is illuminated. Violet's elevator is panelled in Chinese lacquer with lovely bird-pictures on it (p. 379); Catherine was told by Sebastian suddenly last summer, "Let's fly north,

[303] Ibid., p. 405.

[304] Ibid., pp. 406-407.

[305] Ibid., p. 411.

little bird--I want to walk under those radiant, cold northern lights. . . ."[306]

Other animal images are those of carnivores: the hospital where Dr. Cukrowicz works and Catherine is being kept is Lion's View (p. 365); Sebastian's death appropriately occurred at Cabeza de Lobo (Wolf's head).[307] The wolf image appears again in reference to Catherine's affair with the man at the Mardi Gras ball, where she was used in the same kind of psychological cannibalism. She says that she couldn't forget the incident and when she was in Paris she took a walk "from the Hotel Plaza Athenee to the Place de l'Etoile as if pursued by a pack of Siberian wolves!. . .'Where did she think she was going? Back to Duelling Oaks?'--Everything chilly and dim but his hot, ravenous mouth! on--"[308] In the same way the children that eventually devoured Sebastian are first referred to as "bands of homeless young people that lived on the free beach like scavenger dogs, hungry children. . . ."[309] Catherine is

[306] Ibid., p. 375.

[307] It is no accident that two devouring acts sound alike: Catherine's lobotomy and Sebastian's death at Cabeza de Lobo.

[308] Williams, "Suddenly, p. 399.

[309] Ibid., p. 413.

likened to one of these flesh-eaters briefly by her brother George when he says she is crazy like a coyote (p. 381); but he is referring to her cleverness rather than to her fierceness. Mrs. Venable is compared to victim rather than to predator, and both times is likened to a fish (which has traditionally been a symbol of sacrifice): she wears a starfish of diamonds (p. 350); and she gasps like a great hooked fish when Catherine says Sebastian was using them both to procure for him (p. 412). Mrs. Venable herself mentions sacrifice when she says that Catherine is spreading the story about Sebastian to satisfy her own ego; she says that people who thank their benefactors are scarce as hen's teeth, and usually the benefactor is in the role of a sacrificial victim.[310] Thus even the most clichéd animal reference is fraught with the major theme of guilt offering/cannibalism--and even of truth, for we wonder if there can be any truth in what Mrs. Venable says. This serves to demonstrate the perfectly unified work of art which "Suddenly Last Summer" is. Each phrase contributes to the final effect, to Williams's theme.

These shorter plays demonstrate the range of Williams's

[310] *Ibid.*, pp. 363-364.

talent and skill in his use of animal images. In dialogue, in stage directions, as backstage orchestration or onstage prop, the animal image pervades Williams's work. At their worst they are intrusive, over-explained, and obvious; at their best they form a fascinating unity with the work as a whole, its theme and conception. This artistic union is found most frequently in the playwright's full-length plays, to be considered in the next chapter.

VI. ANIMAL IMAGES IN WILLIAMS'S FULL-LENGTH PLAYS

Tennessee Williams has written nine full-length dramas, and each contains significant animal images. This chapter will discuss these plays in chronological order, considering the Summer and Smoke (Eccentricities of a Nightingale) pair together and the Orpheus Descending (Battle of Angels, The Fugitive Kind) series together. The frequency of and emphasis given to animal images in these longer works establishes their importance and integration in Williams's thought and art.

The unifying image in The Glass Menagerie is Laura's glass unicorn, the favorite animal in her collection. The unicorn is ideally suited to Williams's purposes of contrasting Laura's fragile world of escapism and illusion with the shattering world of reality. According to Rupert Allen, the unicorn, which seeks freedom and refuge in the high mountains, is a symbol of solitude and purity.[1] Moreover, it is a symbol of chastity. Legend has it that it is tireless when pursued, yet it falls meekly to the ground when approached by a virgin; therefore, according to Cirlot, it is symbolic of sublimated sex.[2] Cirlot quotes

[1]Allen, pp. 186-187.

[2]Cirlot, pp. 337-338.

Honorius of Autun in his Speculum de Mysteriis Ecclesiae:

> The very fierce animal with only one horn is called a unicorn. In order to catch it, a virgin is put in a field; the animal then comes to her and is caught, because it lies down in her lap. Christ is represented by this animal, and his invincible strength by its horn. He, who lay down in the womb of the Virgin, has been caught by the hunters; that is to say, he was found in human shape by those who loved him.[3]

The idea of sublimated sex implicit in the unicorn is borne out by the importance of its horn and is no doubt one of the ideas Williams intended to convey in the character of Laura. The horn of the unicorn is supposed to be an antidote against poison and is also a symbol of royal power or manly power, according to Willy Ley.[4] All its strength lies in its horn, which is not only a phallic symbol, but also a symbol of the sword or word of God. According to Odell Shepard in The Lore of the Unicorn, the serpent poisoned the water of life and the unicorn purified it by making the sign of the cross.[5] The horn

[3]Ibid.

[4]Willy Ley, The Lungfish and the Unicorn: An Excursion into Romantic Zoology (New York: Modern Age Books, 1941), pp. 24,33.

[5]Odell Shepard, The Lore of the Unicorn (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1886), p. 60.

was not only a weapon, but was thought to be a projection of the mind of the animal. Strength, aggressiveness, and generative virtue are said to be contained in the horn. It is the horn which makes Laura's unicorn different from the other horses in her collection. It is unique, and therefore in danger of destruction. In the scene between Laura and Jim, she points out the fragility of the unicorn:

> LAURA: Oh, be careful--if you breathe, it breaks!
> JIM: I'd better not take it. I'm pretty clumsy with things.
> LAURA: Go on, I trust you with him! . . .There now--you're holding him gently! Hold him over the light, he loves the light! You see how it shines through him? . . .I shouldn't be partial, but he is my favorite one. . . .
> JIM: Unicorns, aren't they extinct in the modern world? . . .Poor little fellow, he must feel sort of lonesome.
> LAURA (smiling): Well, if he does he doesn't complain about it. He stays on a shelf with some horses that don't have horns and all of them seem to get along nicely together.[6]

The parallel between Laura's fragile emotions and Jim's clumsy way of dealing with them is obvious. Later, when Jim tries to get Laura to dance but she says she would step on him, he says that he is not made of glass. The implication, of course, is

[6]Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie in An Introduction to Literature, 3rd ed., ed. Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman, and William Burto (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 738.

that he may not be, but she certainly is. When the unicorn's horn is broken off, making it just like all the other horses, Laura says that perhaps it is a blessing is disguise: "I'll just imagine he had an operation. The horn was removed to make him feel less--freakish! (They both laugh.) Now he will feel more at home with the other horses. . ."[7] The freakishness of the unicorn parallels Laura's crippled leg. Cirlot has noted that fabulous animals such as the unicorn or the griffin are ambivalent symbols due to the magic importance placed upon abnormality and deformity.[8] The unicorn symbol in The Glass Menagerie is ambivalent as well. It represents not only Laura, her fragility, her lameness, and her uniqueness, but also Jim and the hope placed on him to have the manly strength to rescue the virgin Laura from her life. It also represents the importance Williams places on physical deformity to symbolize emotional crippling. In addition, the unicorn represents Laura's dreams--her retreat from reality in general, and her dream of romance with Jim in particular. When he kisses her, she is dazed and slowly raises her hand with the broken

[7]Ibid., p. 740.

[8]Cirlot, p. 11.

unicorn in it and looks at it with a bewildered, tender expression. He dimly senses her feelings and disillusions her. After his speech about his engagement, her look changes and her eyes return from his to the ornament in her hand. She is left desolate, but she gently places the broken unicorn, which is no longer like her, in the hands of the clumsy Irishman, who has broken not only her unicorn but her heart. He has given her only a temporary glimpse of real life before she returns to the fantasy world of glass. He serves as a messenger of truth in the actual world, but he cannot assure Laura happiness in it--he can offer her only what he could do for the unicorn, assure it of being no longer a freak. He forcibly restores Laura and the unicorn to the world of real beings. However, it is a tragic return to reality, which shatters both Laura and the unicorn. The tragedy is that Laura's illusions are shattered by her look at the real world so that she is unable to completely return to illusion; she cannot fit into either world. As Jim has said, unicorns are extinct in the modern world. It is significant that the unicorn is a relic of the past, because the past, represented by Amanda's blind devotion to the outmoded, dominates the play. According to Sam Bluefarb in "The Glass Menagerie: Three Visions of Time,"

each of the Wingfields is trying to escape from time. Each one symbolizes a view of time which is not only static, but fails to come to terms with the nature of the flow of time. It has been Laura's experience to see the present as containing all that is ugly and misshapen:

> It is the present, with its shattered hope, that lies smashed, no longer a cohesive unit, around her. Curiously, the glass animals, instead of being vague, distant, faerie-like, are the only artifacts in the play that hold any degree of reality for Laura. If they are fragile, they are also strong. And if they are glass, they have a certain quality of transparency which permits their owner the full view of a world that is not bounded by time and lameness. . . . They are at least tangible and therefore reliable . . . .They have more substance than mere memory. They will be there tomorrow, as they were yesterday, as they are today; broken or not, they will always be there. . . .Time has ceased to have any meaning whatever for Laura; her whole existence turns on a fulcrum of no-time.[9]

The Wingfields must choose between the reality of an ugly and meaningless present or the illusion of beauty, which Laura finds in her glass animals, which Amanda tries to form by molding her world into a pattern of gentility which she believed existed in her girlhood, and which Tom courts vicariously in

[9]Sam Bluefarb, "The Glass Menagerie: Three Visions of Time," College English, XXIV (April, 1963), 517.

movie theaters. Williams contrasts what is with what ought to be. William Sharp writes that Williams

> opposes the unhealthy but attractive romanticism of the past with the healthy but crude and unbeautiful reality of the present. Laura's glass animals--fragile, beautiful, but wholly impractical--are in quiet but real opposition to Jim, the gentleman caller's 'Knowledge--Zzzp! Money--Zzzp! Power!'[10]

This contrast of romanticism and reality, of past and present, is also a contrast of spirit and body. When Tom explains that man is by instinct a fighter, a hunter and a lover, Amanda explodes. The word "instinct" sets her off, a dirty word to her:

> AMANDA: Instinct is something that people have got away from! It belongs to animals! Christian adults don't want it!
> TOM: What do Christian adults want, then, Mother?
> AMANDA: Superior things! Things of the mind and the spirit! Only animals have to satisfy instincts! Sure your aims are somewhat higher than theirs! Than monkeys--pigs--
> TOM: I reckon they're not.[11]

The attitudes of Tom and Amanda symbolize the conflict between body and spirit. The same conflict is evident at the beginning

[10]William Sharp, "An Unfashionable View of Tennessee Williams," Tulane Drama Review, VI, iii (March, 1962), 161.

[11]Williams, Menagerie, p. 712.

of the play, when Amanda is nagging at Tom about his table manners. He should not push with his fingers and he should chew his food:

> AMANDA: Animals have sections in their stomachs which enable them to digest food without mastication, but human beings are supposed to chew their food before they swallow it down. . . .
> TOM: I haven't enjoyed one bite of this dinner because of your constant directions on how to eat it. It's you that makes me rush through meals with your hawk-like attention to every bite I take. Sickening--spoils my appetite--all this discussion of animals' secretion--salivary glands--mastication![12]

Amanda, even though she champions the spiritual, has become the aggressive, hawk-like predator because of the harsh circumstances in which she finds herself. For example, she conducts a laughable but touching campaign to sell magazine subscriptions, "realizing that extra money would be needed to properly feather the nest and plume the bird"[13] for the gentleman caller. She is well aware of the position of unmarried women in the South, "stuck away in some little mousetrap of a room--encouraged by one in-law to visit another--little birdlike

[12] Ibid., p. 696.

[13] Ibid., p. 703.

women without any nest--eating the crust of humility all their life!"[14] The spiritual characters are most often associated with birds or with the Williamsian fragile moths. Amanda and Laura are compared to moths as they remove dishes from the table in the shadowy upstage area, their movements formalized as dance or ritual, their moving forms pale and silent (p. 714). Laura seems to feel a kinship towards the birds at the zoo, for she visits the penguins at the bird-houses there every day instead of going to business school (p. 701). Laura's shyness is compared to that of a frightened deer as she darts through the portieres after Jim's arrival (p. 725). There is some reference to the theme of illusion even in this seemingly off-hand description, for Rowland writes that in Celtic legend the deer might be a visitor from the fairy world, and if the hunter killed him, he fell under an illusion. In general, she adds, the killing of a deer was the way to secure a vision or a dreamlike happening.[15] Usually, however, the stricken deer denotes unhappy love and grief.[16] Thus the image is an appropriate one for Laura. The animal images which apply to the body side of

[14] Ibid., p. 702.

[15] Rowland, p. 96.

[16] Ibid., p. 98.

the body and spirit conflict are few and unoriginal. Amanda refers to an old beau who has become rich as "the wolf of Wall Street,"[17] and to the house as a pigsty (p. 716) in which they cannot receive a gentleman caller. The clumsy Jim, who represents the body and the modern industrial society, is as comfortable as a cow (p. 732), an image which suggests his complacency and his mindlessness as well as his comfort. Yet Jim has shown the only kindness toward Tom at the warehouse where they work, and "gradually his attitude affected the others, their hostility wore off and they also began to smile at me as people smile at an oddly fashioned dog who trots across their path at some distance."[18] The image was used in the same way in "Portrait of a Girl in Glass." Yet amid the conflict of body and spirit the play constantly returns to the major theme of reality and illusion, and of people trapped by the realities of life. In a passage full of allusions to Christ, Tom tells of an act at the movie theater in which Malvolio the magician waved his magic scarf over a canary cage and it turned into a bowl of goldfish and then turned back into canaries again. The magic act is, of course, illusion, and the animals which the magician

[17]Williams, Menagerie, p. 698.

[18]Ibid., p. 720.

uses are imprisoned in their environments just as the Wingfields are. Through a trick of illusion the animals are transformed into something else, but even illusion cannot free them; they remain imprisoned during their transformation. Thus any attempt at escape is futile, and all the characters are failures.

But although the characters themselves are failures, their characterizations, the imagery, and the play as a whole are not. The play is natural and truthful, and the central image is well integrated and rich with meaning, while reinforcing the central theme. As Roger B. Stein has written,

> Williams is almost too insistent at times on the parallel between Laura and her menagerie, between the glass unicorn's losing its horn and Jim's impotence when he tries to bring Laura into the "real world." But. . .Williams does not hand the entire play upon his title symbol; instead he gives to the play as a whole a poetic texture and a wealth of ironic allusion.[19]

The world of A Streetcar Named Desire is again the combination of realism and fantasy. Williams consciously employs symbols carefully designed to evoke the two worlds of the play. Blanche's first appearance onstage suggests the implicit

[19]Roger B. Stein, "The Glass Menagerie Revisited: Catastrophe Without Violence," Western Humanities Review, XVIII, (Spring, 1964), p. 145.

contrast in the play. The scene is Elysian Fields Street in New Orleans which combines squalor and "the atmosphere of decay" with a quaint, raffish charm and a kind of lyricism. This synthesis of contrasting elements is repeated by showing the neighbor women, one white and one colored, in an "easy intermingling of races" in the cosmopolitan city. Stanley enters in all his masculine vigor, carrying a red-stained package from the butcher's and throwing it to Stella while the neighbors make suggestive jokes. To this environment comes Blanche, daintily dressed, fragile, "incongruous to this setting." Williams writes that "her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light. There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggests a moth."[20] With this image Williams has suggested both Blanche's fragility and her capacity of being destroyed by her own desires, for it is the desire in the moth which draws it to the light, the flame, of destruction. The image of the moth in the flame may also suggest the purification, or atonement, through subjecting oneself to the glare of the flame, which idea occurred in Suddenly

[20]Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire (New York: New Directions, 1947), p. 5.

Last Summer (Sebastian also wore white clothes) and other works.[21] A similar image, that of a butterfly, appears later in the play, again in conjunction with the light, when Blanche says,

> I never was hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft--soft people have got to shimmer and glow--they've got to put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and put a--paper lantern over the light. . . .It isn't enough to be soft. You've got to be soft and attractive.[22]

The paper lantern over the light, of course, is a major image in the play, and here it is linked with the image of a butterfly's wings, suggesting not only beauty and fragility, but also illusion. Desperately seeking refuge, Blanche recoils from the ugliness of the apartment of her sister and brother-in-law and tries to make it bearable by bringing beauty to it. Thus she adorns the bed with a new spread and the naked bulb with a Chinese lamp shade. In the same way she adorns herself with

[21]Blanche's constant bathing, which provides her with a womb-like, warm security, may also be symtomatic of her wish for redemption and purification.

[22]Williams, Streetcar, p. 92. In another version of the play this speech reads, ". . .soft people have got to cow to the favor of hard ones, Stella. Have got to be seductive--put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and glow--make a little--temporary magic just in order to pay for--one night's shelter!" (p. 91).

her fake furs and rhinestone necklaces, in protection from reality and from the changes which time has wrought. As she tells Mitch when he tears the paper lantern off the light bulb,

> I don't want realism. I want magic!. . .Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell truth, I tell what ought to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it!--Don't turn the light on![23]

That is exactly what damns Blanche, for at the end of the play Stanley seizes the paper lantern, tearing it off the light blub, and thrusts it at Blanche, who cries out as if the lantern were herself.[24] At the same time that she attempts to create illusion, however, she is keenly aware of the truth. As Benjamin Nelson notes, "Blanche has no illusions about her illusions. . . Her story of the demise of Belle Reve shows that she has a much firmer grip on reality than she wishes."[25] She shows her recognition of truth when she admits to flirting with Stanley, and

[23]Ibid., p. 41.

[24]Ibid., p. 176. It is appropriate for Stanley to be the destroyer of illusion, for he had earlier been the destroyer of light. Stella tells of their wedding night when Stanley "snatched off one of my slippers and rushed about the place smashing the light-bulbs with it." (p. 72).

[25]Nelson, p. 143.

she shows her knowledge of her penchant for embroidering the truth when she tells Stanley, "I know I fib a great deal. After all, a woman's charm is fifty per cent illusion, but when a thing is important, I tell the truth. . ."[26] Her symbol in the play is not only the shade over the light, but also the light itself. Elia Kazan calls her a "little twisted, pathetic, confused bit of light and culture" who is "the only voice of light. It is flickering and, in the course of the play, goes out."[27] It is precisely that light in her which is abhorrent to Stanley (he and Stella make love in the dark) and which causes her destruction.[28] Williams uses the spider image to further emphasize the contrast of opposites in Blanche. She says that she stayed at a hotel called the Tarantula Arms: "Yes, a big spider! That's where I brought my victims. . . ."[29] The spider, as has been noted, represents aggressiveness, as Blanche

[26]Williams, Streetcar, p. 41.

[27]Eliz Kazan, "notebook for A Streetcar Named Desire," Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Streetcar Named Desire, ed. by Jordan Miller (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), pp. 21, 23.

[28]The light also appears when the headlight of the locomotive glares inside the apartment just as Blanche tells Mitch that the boy she was married to was homosexual (p. 114).

[29]Williams, Streetcar, p. 140.

uses it here; but it also represents creative power, as in its web, which is a spiral net converging toward a central point, thus representing the center of the world or even, according to Cirlot, imagination.[30] The spider is the eternal weaver of the web of illusion, constantly weaving and killing, winding up the thread of old life to build a new life. This alternation of forces represented in the spider exists in Blanche to the point of schizophrenia. David Sievers sees in Streetcar a picture of the origins and growth of schizophrenia;[31] Elia Kazan sees in Blanche an inner character contradiction--bossy yet helpless, domineering yet shaky;[32] and John Mason Brown writes that Blanche's tragedy lies within her own nature--from her "uncontrollable duplicity," from her "pathetic pretensions to gentility," from "her love of the refined when her life is devoted to coarseness," from the "fastidiousness of her tastes and the wantonness of her desires," from "her incapacity to live up to her dreams," and from "her selfishness and her vanity."[33]

[30]Cirlot, pp. 289-290.

[31]W. David Sievers, "Most Famous of Streetcars," in Twentieth Century Interpretations, p. 92.

[32]Kazan, p. 22.

[33]John Mason Brown, "Southern Discomfort," in Twentieth Century Interpretations, p. 43.

Thus, the insect images very appropriately show Blanche's personality fragmentation and disintegration.

If Blanche is a moth, she is also a tiger. There is a desire for life in her, a straining against the streetcar named Cemeteries. Blanche is still struggling at the moment when Stanley rapes her, saying, "Tiger--tiger! Drop the bottle-top! Drop it! We've had this date with each other from the beginning!"[34] The chaos and evil of the jungle (mirroring the chaos and evil in Blanche's mind) lurk in the background during this scene: repeatedly Williams calls attention to the cries and noises of the jungle with phrases such as "The night is filled with inhuman voices like cries in a jungle,"[35] and "The inhuman jungle voices rise up."[36] In calling Blanche "Tiger," Stanley recognizes the sexual weakness in Blanche and pinpoints the one way he can destroy her. Sex, which had always been Blanche's weakness and Stanley's strength, is the appropriate way for Stanley to degrade Blanche and bring her to his level. But ironically, the rape lowers Stanley to

[34]Williams, Streetcar, p. 155.

[35]Ibid., p. 152.

[36]Ibid., p. 154.

Blanche's level by destroying what moral superiority he might have had over her. Stanley not only uses a cat image to describe Blanche's sexual weakness; he also uses a cat image to refer to another of her moral weaknesses--alcohol. Mitch reports that Stan says Blanche has been "lapping his liquor up all summer like a wild-cat!"[37] The cat nature in Blanche is something she is trying to repress, and any reminder of it, any realization of the evil within herself, startles her. For example, when Blanche first arrives and begins to look around the apartment, a cat screeches and she catches her breath with a startled gesture;[38] later, during her first conversation with Stanley, a cat screeches near the window and Blanche springs up.[39] These serve not only as reminders of her inherent weakness, but also as foreshadowings of the rape to come.

Sexual screeches appear in reference to the goat as well as to the cat, as the neighbor Steve bounds after his wife Eunice "with goatlike screeches,"[40] in an obvious sexual romp.

[37]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 143.

[38]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 16.

[39]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 32.

[40]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 95.

Stanley's sexuality is evident, even to his astrological sign, which is Capricorn, the goat. Williams arranges for the audience's sympathies to lie with Stanley (and against Blanche) at the beginning of the play by having Blanche threaten the happiness of his home as the intruder and by describing him as sensually alive, using a bird image:

> Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens. Branching out from this complete and satisfying center are all the auxiliary channels of his life, such as his heartiness with men, his appreciation of rough humor, his love of good drink and food and games, his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer. . . .[41]

The viewer soon discovers, however, that Stanley is the supreme hedonist, devoted only to the satisfaction of his own pleasures, dominating his home through sex and sheer animal force. The other bird images in the play serve to emphasize the sexual theme. For example, during the poker game Steve tells a joke about a rooster chasing a hen and stopping to peck at some corn, letting the hen get away. "Lord God, I hopes I never gits <u>that</u>

[41] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 25.

hongry!" is the punch line.[42] Stanley's attitude towards chattering, inferior females is implied when he yells, "You hens cut out that conversation in there."[43] He is becoming increasingly unable to mask his resentment of Blanche's intrusion in his home. When she sings in the bath-tub, Stanley sneers, "Some canary-bird, huh!"[44] Blanche's sexual career is associated with a second class hotel called the Flamingo, and sexuality is even implied when Blanche tells Stella she is as plump as a little partridge, referring to her weight gain due to her pregnancy.

Stanley, of course, is associated with brute animal force. When he and Stella come together it is with low, animal moans.[45] He throws his head back and bellows his wife's name like a baying hound (p. 66). Blanche immediately recognizes the power in him--"what such a man has to offer is animal force and he

[42]Ibid., p. 52. Blanche also tells a joke, about a parrot who curses and whose cage is put under a covering when the preacher comes to visit. The parrot swears, "God damn, but that was a short day!" (p. 130). The fact that she knows such a story, of course, belies the illusion of purity which she is trying to maintain.

[43]Ibid., p. 57.

[44]Ibid., p. 116.

[45]Ibid., p. 67.

gave a wonderful exhibition of that"[46]--and thinks perhaps his animal shrewdness and vitality are "what we need to mix with our blood now that we've lost Belle Reve."[47] Later, Stella brings on a violent outburst of rage in Stanley by shouting at him, "--drunk--drunk--animal thing, you!"[48] His behavior provokes Blanche's impassioned speech about the brutes, which Stanley overhears:

> . . .There's something downright--bestial--about him!. . .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, like one of those pictures I've seen in--anthropological studies! . . .Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle!. . . Night falls and the other apes gather! There in the front of the cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing and hulking! His poker night! --you call it--this party of apes! Somebody growls--some creature snatches at something--the fight is on! God! Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella--my sister--there has been some progress since then! Such things as art--as poetry and music--such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make grow! And cling to, and hold as our flag!. . .Don't--don't hang back with the brutes![49]

[46] Ibid., p. 79.

[47] Ibid., p. 45.

[48] Ibid., p. 62.

[49] Ibid., p. 83.

It is crucial that Stanley hear such statements as this, for they arouse him to anger and to sex. Elia Kazan notes that "In Stanley sex goes under a disguise. Nothing is more erotic and arousing to him than 'airs'. . .she thinks she's better than me. . .I'll show her. . .Sex equals domination. . .anything that challenges him--like calling him 'common'--arouses him sexually. . . ."[50] Thus, when Stella calls him a drunk animal thing, he goes into a rage; when Stella says that Mr. Kowalski is too busy making a pig of himself to be amused by Blanche's parrot story, he throws his plate to the floor and tells her never to talk that way;[51] and when Blanche tells him that she cast her pearls before swine, "Yes, swine! Swine! And I'm thinking not only of you but of your friend, Mr. Mitchell . . .,"[52] he rapes her. (The only other animal image relating to Mitch compares him to an awkward, dancing bear, moving in delighted imitation of Blanche's romantic waltzing.[53] He is contrasted to Blanche, for he could never fit into her idealized world; yet he is also awkward in Stanley's world.)

[50]Kazan, p. 27.

[51]<u>Streetcar</u>, pp. 130-131.

[52]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 156.

[53]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 62.

Two images of animals from the sea appear in the play. Stanley justifies telling Mitch about Blanche's past by saying that maybe Mitch would have married her, but "he's not going to jump in a tank with a school of sharks--now!"[54] Stanley is well aware of the evil nature of Blanche, but he exaggerates it to suggest that she would destroy Mitch like a school of sharks. If she has caused the destruction of anything, it has not been intentional. The other sea image is the seahorse pin which Blanche wants to wear on the lapel of her jacket as they lead her away to the state asylum. It is reminiscent of the starfish pin worn by Mrs. Venable of Suddenly Last Summer and serves to represent some romantic desire for the beauty of the past.

Williams's language in the play is lively with the passion and rhythm of real speech. Although there are several clichés using animal images, the clichés serve to deepen meaning and mirror natural speech. For example, Stanley utters such expressions as "cat's out of the bag," "that shut her up like a clam," and "What's all this monkey doings?," to show his contempt for Blanche. He shows that he knows what he wants and how to get it by his statement, "You know what luck is? Luck

[54]Ibid., p. 122.

is believing you're lucky. . . .To hold front position in this rat-race you've got to believe you are lucky." To this Mitch can only say, "you. . .you. . .you. . .Brag. . .brag. . . bull. . .bull."[55] Stanley recognizes that he is a rat in the rat-race, but he is going to be king of the rats. He will unconcernedly play poker as Blanche is preparing to leave. Eunice comments on the men's callousness, "Making pigs of yourselves,"[56] but Mitch's nervousness always shows through when he is playing poker--even under the best of circumstances, he twitches and they say he has ants.[57] Mitch shows his awkwardness and nervousness with women in the clumsy but endearing way he courts Blanche; it is ironic that she asks Stanley before she meets him if he is a wolf. The bear image fits him much better.

Other symbolic images, such as the locomotive, the heart-shaped box in which Blanche keeps her trinkets, and the doctor and nurse who come at the end, appear in the play but are outside the realm of this paper. Suffice it to say that Williams's use of symbols is carefully and skillfully integrated in a pattern of rhythms and associations. Even the most banal element, the most hackneyed cliché, creates a unique and vital meaning.

[55] Ibid., p. 158.

[56] Ibid.

Williams has written that he prefers The Eccentricities of a Nightingale to Summer and Smoke because it is less conventional and melodramatic.[58] Animal images in Eccentricities, which evolved from Summer and Smoke, are more unified, and this fact alone may make it a better play. Nevertheless, both plays are too structured as a symbolic conflict between the spirit and the flesh to be believable; the symbolism is highly contrived, with many external symbols, such as the stone angel Eternity and the doctor's anatomy chart. Yet the theme of conflict between the mind and the flesh, between order and chaos, although not so clear-cut as the playwright pictures it, is a universal struggle. There is beauty and truth in the portrayal of human incompletion and the vain search for communication.

Both Alma and John are incomplete, fragmented characters who lack love and who suffer from the inability to communicate their inner feelings. Alma says,

> Oh, I suppose I am sick, one of those weak and divided people who slip like shadows among you solid strong ones. But sometimes, out of neces-

[58]Tennessee Williams, The Eccentricities of a Nightingale and Summer and Smoke (New York: New Directions, 1948), p. 4.

> sity, we shadowy people take on a strength of our own.[59]

Alma's soulful nature is symbolized with images such as shadow and smoke. Yet she is possessed with a deeply sexual nature which threatens to overwhelm her. Her underlying sensual nature becomes more evident with a study of the animal symbols applied to her. In the prologue Alma's eyes are said to be cat eyes,[60] certainly not a symbol for her spiritual nature, but rather one of the most sensuous nature. She seeks out people such as those in her literary group, who share the same spiritual philosophy, but most of the group are merely silly or even cruel, as they are the night when Vernon's verse play is "maliciously, spitefully, and vindictively torn to pieces, the way children tear the wings off butterflies."[61] One of the men in the group, Mr. Doremus, seems to be of a spiritual nature; he is described as a small man, somewhat like a sparrow.[62] But when Alma entertains him, the glass pitcher of

[59]Williams, Summer and Smoke, pp. 236-237.

[60]Ibid., p. 118.

[61]Ibid., p. 224.

[62]Ibid., p. 149.

lemonade with cherries and orange slices in it is like a little aquarium of tropical fish.[63] Not only are they fish, symbols of fertility, but they are tropical fish, from the hot, passionate tropics. In addition, when Alma says that she is as hoarse as a frog,[64] the frog not only symbolizes the sound of her voice, but also reminds the reader of the idea of fertility. Of course, all these symbolic meanings are unconscious on the part of Alma, as is her sexual nature; but they are there nevertheless. Moreover, several other images are more overt implications of Alma's passionate nature. After John's abortive effort to seduce Alma at the Moon Lake Casino, he calls her a taxi, and as he disappears, she makes a sound in her throat like a hurt animal.[65] Later, when their positions are reversed and Alma espouses the things of the flesh and John the things of the spirit, she comes to his office to seduce him. In the background mellow gold light touches the vane of a gilded weathercock, as well as the wings of the stone angel, while a singing wind rises and falls throughout the

[63] Ibid., p. 199.

[64] Ibid., p. 154.

[65] Ibid., p. 196.

scene.[66] The weathercock, of course, is a symbol for the sensual aspects of life. Miss Alma remarks that the wind seems determined to take the plume off her hat "like that fox terrier we had once named Jacob, snatched the plume off a hat and dashed around and around the back yard with it like a trophy!"[67] Williams expands his use of the plume as a symbol in Eccentricities, but here it at least represents her spiritual nature, since it is from a bird and birds usually represent the soul. But the spiritual nature has been snatched off the hat by a dog--obviously representing her turnabout. She recognizes, as he did, that a sensual nature existed in her--"I looked up doppelganger and I found that it means another person inside me, another self, and I don't know whether to thank you or not for making me conscious of it!"[68]

At their previous encounter, when John had tried to seduce Alma, the image of the cock-fight had predominated, both to indicate the conflict between the two and to suggest the physical, bestial, sexual nature of mankind which is the pivot

[66] Ibid., p. 230.

[67] Ibid., p. 231.

[68] Ibid., p. 233.

of their conflict. John had wanted to hear "Yellow Dog Blues," another symbol of his physical nature, and as the cock-fight had started Alma had told him, "There are some women who turn a possibly beautiful thing into something no better than the coupling of beasts!--but love is what you bring to it. . . Some people bring just their bodies. But there are some people, there are some women, John--who can bring their hearts to it, also--who can bring their souls to it!"[69] It is interesting that the two other women John is attracted to, Rosa and Nellie, have had experiences witnessing their parents' lovemaking which probably prevents their complete sexual satisfaction. And although Alma does not know of their experiences, she is surely referring to them, or at least to Rosa, when she mentions women who couple like beasts. Rosa tells John that she grew up in a one room house where all the family had to sleep, "five Mexicans and three geese and a little game-cock named Pepe! . . .And in the night, I would hear the love-making. Papa would grunt like a pig to show his passion. I thought to myself, how dirty it was, love-making. . . .And, oh, I'm so glad that you never grunt like a pig to show your passion!"[70] Nellie, too,

[69] Ibid., p. 194.

[70] Ibid., p. 205.

had thought all men were pigs since all the men her mother picked up acted "like pigs, pigs, pigs!"[71] John considers himself a pig: "Did anyone ever slide downhill as fast as I have this summer? Ha-ha! Like a greased pig. . . ."[72] His feelings of guilt for his depravity, plus the death of his father, which occurs after Dr. Buchanan tells Rosa's father to "Get your--swine out of--my house!" and strikes his cane at the chest of the "bull-like" man,[73] provide John with the motivation for the change in his character. His change, however, does not seem true to his character; rather, he is like the people of the town who had scorned John and then cheered him, according to Mr. Winemiller, "like grasshoppers, just as likely to jump one way as another."[74]

Several changes are apparent from Summer and Smoke to Eccentricities of a Nightingale. Williams adds the character of John's mother, Mrs. Buchanan, and the story of Alma's Aunt Albertine who died in a fire set by her husband; and his imagery is more integrated and unified, centering around bird

[71]Ibid., p. 157.

[72]Ibid., p. 204.

[73]Ibid., p. 208.

[74]Ibid., p. 218.

images. Alma is closely associated with birds, which represent her spiritual nature. She is called "the Nightingale of the Delta,"[75] because she sings with so much feeling. She scatters breadcrumbs for the birds in the square, for which her father calls her eccentric,[76] and for which John's mother criticizes her: "Talks to them, calls them! 'Here, birds, here, birds, here, birdies!' Holding out her hand with some scraps of bread!"[77] Alma's father criticizes her for her affectations: "In ordinary conversations you get carried away by your emotions or something. . . .You--express yourself in--fantastic highflown--phrases! Your hands fly about you like a pair of wild birds! You, you get out of breath, you--stammer, you--laugh hysterically and clutch at your throat!"[78] She refers to the same volatile nature in herself:

> ALMA: . . .And when you marry, you'll marry some Northern beauty. She will have no eccentricities but the eccentricity of beauty and perfect calm. Her hands will have such repose, such perfect repose when she speaks. They won't fly about her like wild birds, oh, no, she'll hold them together, press the little pink tips of her

[75]Williams, The Eccentricities of a Nightingale, p. 13.

[76]Ibid., p. 29.

[77]Ibid., pp. 52-53.

[78]Ibid., p. 28.

> fingers together, making a--steeple--or fold them sweetly and gravely in her lap! She'll only move them when she lifts a tea cup--they won't reach above her when she cries out in the night! Suddenly, desperately--fly up, fly up in the night!--reaching for something--nothing!--clutching at--space. . . .[79]

Her heightened sensitive nature is suggested by these bird images. Even her laughter, which rings out high and clear, is not like a woman's, but more like the cry of a bird.[80] Alma is also associated with the mechanical bird-girl, a marvel invented and operated by her uncle. The story about the bird-girl in the Musée Mécanique in New Orleans is told twice in the play, once by Mrs. Winemiller and once by Alma. The bird-girl, "almost the biggest mechanical triumph since the Eiffel Tower," according to Mrs. Winemiller, was made of sterling silver and "every three minutes a little mechanical bird pops out of her mouth and sings three beautiful notes as clear as--a bell!"[81] Alma identifies with her Aunt Albertine, who "grew up, like me, in the shadow of the church,"[82] and who

[79] Ibid., p. 75.

[80] Ibid., p. 95.

[81] Ibid., p. 39.

[82] Ibid., p. 82.

bought a plumed hat and ran off with the bigamous Mr. Schwarzkopf, the mechanical genius who created the bird-girl. Alma calls the bird-girl Mr. Schwarzkopf's masterpiece:

> Every five minutes a tin bird flew out of her mouth and whistled three times, clear as a bell, and flew back in again. She smiled and nodded, lifted her arms as if to embrace a lover. Mr. Schwarzkopf was enchanted by his bird-girl. Everything else was neglected. . . .He'd suddenly get out of bed in the night and go downstairs to wind her up and sit in front of her, drinking, until she seemed alive to him. . . .[83]

She goes on to relate how creditors took the Museum, locked her uncle out, and planned to auction the mechanical marvels. The night before the auction Mr. Schwarzkopf broke into the Museum and set it on fire. Albertine rushed into the burning building and caught Mr. Schwarzkopf by the sleeve, but he broke away from her. When they dragged her out, she was dying, but still holding onto a button she'd torn from his sleeve, and she said, "Some people don't even die emptyhanded."[84] This story is probably best explained by something Alma says in the earlier play, Summer and Smoke:

[83]Ibid., p. 83. The different details of her story and her mother's show Williams toying with the theme of truth.

[84]Ibid.

> . . .the girl who said "no," she doesn't exist any more, she died last summer--suffocated in smoke from something on fire inside her. No, she doesn't live now, but she left me her ring--. . . .And she said to me when she slipped this ring on my finger--"Remember I died empty-handed, and so make sure that your hands have something in them!"[85]

This relates, of course, to what Alma said about her own hands as they fly about like wild birds, flying up, reaching for nothing, clutching at space. In the story of Aunt Albertine, Williams has combined three images which are central to the story--the bird-girl, which represents Alma; and the plume and the fire, which appear again in the key scene between Alma and John. The two protagonists go to the bedroom of a cheap hotel; the room is cold, so John starts a fire, but it is dying.

> ALMA: . . .Quick, quick, it's expiring! Ring for the boy, ring for the boy! We must have a fire to take the chill off the room!
> JOHN: Are you sure that a fire would take the chill off the room?
> [She suddenly seizes her hat and tears off the plume, starts to cast the plume into the fireplace. He seizes her hand.]
> Miss Alma!
> ALMA: This plume will burn!. . . .This plume will burn! Something has to be sacrificed to a fire.
> JOHN: [still gripping her hand that holds the plume]: Miss Alma. Miss Alma. The fire has gone out and nothing will revive it. Take my word for it,

[85]Williams, Summer and Smoke, p, 235.

nothing!. . .It never was much of a fire, it never really got started, and now it's out. . . . The fire is out, it's gone out, and you feel how the room is now, it's deathly chill. There's no use in staying in it. . . .

ALMA: How gently a failure can happen!. . . .

JOHN: Why--why call it a failure?

ALMA: Why call a spade a spade? I have to be honest. If I had had beauty and desirability and the grace of a woman, it would not have been necessary for me to be honest. My eccentricities--made it necessary. . . .

JOHN: I think honesty is the plume on your hat. And you ought to wear it proudly.

ALMA: Proudly or not proudly, I shall wear it. Now I must put it back on. Where is my hat?--Oh.--Here--the plume is restored to its place!. . . .

JOHN: The plume on your hat is lovely, it almost sweeps the ceiling!. . . .

ALMA:. . . .I'm not ashamed of tonight! I think that you and I have been honest together, even though we failed!

[Something changes between them. He reaches above him, turns out the light bulb. Almost invisibly at first a flickering red glow comes from the fireplace. She has lowered the veil attached to her plumed hat. He turns it gently back from her face. . .and kisses her. Alma turns her face to the audience. The stage has darkened but a flickering red glow now falls across their figures. The fire has miraculously revived itself, a phoenix.]

ALMA: I don't dare to believe it, but look, oh, look, look, John!. . . .Where did the fire come from?

JOHN: No one has ever been able to answer that question!

[The red glow brightens. The scene dims gradually out.][86]

Although the symbolism is obvious, the scene is effectively

[86]Williams, Eccentricities, pp. 99-102.

written and the images are well integrated. The plume is a symbol not only of truth, as John says, but also of Miss Alma's gallantry[87] and of her cavalier spirit. In the scene quoted above Alma recites a poem about a cavalier who wears a tall hat with a plume, charms the woman with his gallant air, and shocks the simple heart with his heartless candor.[88] The plume, a feather, also relates to the bird imagery applied to Alma and signifies lightness, heightening of emotions, and a spiritual nature. The image of the plume, therefore, represents the ambiguity, the dual nature in Alma--and in the soul. Williams has improved the second version by adding the scene with the plume and the fire to make John a more sympathetic character. The scene also adds a note of hope with the resurrection of the fire, like a phoenix. Perhaps Williams suggests here that the only hope for resurrection is by surrendering to the fire of passion; as Alma says, "Something has to be sacrificed to a fire." The idea of a purifying fire, of course, is not a new one in the work of Williams. Its mention in this scene not only amplifies the special tenderness of the scene itself, but

[87]John tells his mother in an earlier scene that he respects Miss Alma for "something she has, a sort of--gallantry, maybe. . . ."(p. 56).

[88]Williams, Eccentricities, p. 101.

also serves as a reminder of the bird-girl story. That story has been a key factor in Alma's recognition of her own desires. The bird-girl in this play recalls the real live bird-girl of "The Mutilated" and, of course, the yellow bird from the short story which inspired this play. Significantly, it is a snake, a boa constrictor which gets cold and swallows its own blanket, which causes the destruction of Mr. Schwarzkopf's Museum and the bird-girl. Thus the evil serpent of desire causes Schwarzkopf, Aunt Albertine, and Alma to burn in the fires of their own passion.

Minor characters in the play are also equated with birds and with other animals. When the play opens, "barely visible figures, laughing, chattering, sweep about the fountain like a sudden passage of birds."[89] A symbol of the townspeople's cruel treatment of Alma for her eccentricities is Mrs. Peacock, and the peacock image is repeated when Alma says that Mrs. Buchanan, John's mother, is as proud of him as a peacock. Mrs. Buchanan is overprotective of her son, chasing after him and calling "John? John? John?" with an idiotic persistence, like a bird.[90] Alma notes that she stands guard over John like an

[89] Ibid., p. 7.

[90] Ibid., p. 12.

old dragon,[91] and John himself refers to the fierceness of her protective attitude toward him when he says, "You know, Mama, I never dreamed that you could be such an old tiger. Tigress, I mean." She replies, "Every mother's a tiger when her son's future happiness is threatened."[92] Williams has replaced John's women in Summer and Smoke, Nellie and Rosa, with this irascible woman, and by this change and by a comment that he has not had much more experience with hired rooms in cheap hotels than Alma has,[93] John's failure to marry Alma is made much more believable. He tells Alma about his first experience in a "house of convenience" with a pickup, who was standing aimlessly around the entrance to the train depot with a small suitcase "like a small dog close to their slippers."[94] He describes this girl as having a "small nose with freckles which is probably still leading her into trouble as straight as a good bird-dog will point at a partridge!"[95] He went to the room because she knew of the place, and he made an excuse to

[91] Ibid., p. 9.

[92] Ibid., p. 56.

[93] Ibid., p. 97.

[94] Ibid., p. 92.

[95] Ibid., p. 93.

slip away from the room and "ran like a rabbit."[96] As the timid and fearful rabbit, he is pursued by the doglike women. Even Alma is the one who suggests that they go to such a room, and as she begins to make the suggestion, the nonrealistic baying of a hound is heard in the distance.[97] Williams implies that it is John's mother who has made him take the role of the pursued. John, of course, is intelligent enough to recognize his mother's solicitude and he gently mocks her as she rhapsodizes about the rich debutante of her dreams who will adore him, marry him, and bear him adorable babies: "Not little pink and white pigs? With ribbons around their tails?"[98] By this statement he shows his contempt for the kind of woman Mrs. Buchanan would choose for him. The other mother of the play, Mrs. Winemiller, is equally contemptible. Evidently, through some fear of sex she has gone crazy--purposefully, according to Reverend Winemiller. Williams illustrates her fragmented mind with the usual image of insects, writing that she constantly talks to herself, her interior monologue sounding

[96]Ibid., p. 92.

[97]Ibid., p. 88.

[98]Ibid., p. 54.

like a swarm of bees.[99] She behaves as a child, and Alma has had to take on the responsibility of mothering her own mother. She childishly demands ice cream, standing in front of the pharmacy "like a mule."[100] Like a mule, she should have been unable to bear children, but Alma, like John, has been shaped and misshapen by her own mother.

The focus of the later play is sharpened on Alma. By placing the struggle between flesh and spirit within one person, Williams has made the drama more plausible, the structure less precise. The animal imagery in the later play is improved as well, becoming more unified and more purposeful, and handled with greater artistry.

The Rose Tattoo is Williams's paean to healthy, robust sexuality, and the animal images in it serve mainly as sex symbols. Sex motivates everything. The playwright seems to be trying to present a view of sex as a liberating force, a panacea for the world's problems. Yet in most of the other plays his view has been that man's sexual nature leaves him open and vulnerable to degradation and destruction. The Rose

[99] Ibid., p. 21.

[100] Williams, Summer and Smoke, p. 216.

Tattoo view, that of propounding sex as a glorified creative function, is not Williams's basic belief, and thus he relies too heavily on symbolism and preaches too excessively for the play to have much depth. The rose symbol, for example, appears everywhere from wallpaper to chest tattoos to make preachments about the cosmic significance of the sex act. Yet even here Williams's attitude is ambivalent, and many of the animal images represent opposing ideas about sex.

The goat is the chief animal symbol in The Rose Tattoo. Traditionally, and in this play, it symbolizes several ambivalent ideas. Beryl Rowland writes that

> From earliest times the goat has been a symbol of libido and procreation. . . .
>
> [Well] known is the association of the goat with the celebrations of Dionysus. . . .Dionysus was identified with the goat. . . .Such festivals provided an escape from inhibitions. They were a group expression of repressed desires. . . .
>
> The goat has always had a reputation for lasciviousness. . . .It is, therefore, not surprising that the goat or the goat-god. . .should be taken from earliest times as a symbol of the active male principle. . . .[101]

Williams was well aware of the Dionysian significance of the goat when he wrote The Rose Tattoo. About the play he wrote:

[101]Rowland, pp. 80-81.

> The Rose Tattoo is the Dionysian element in human life, its mystery, its beauty, its significance. It is that glittering quicksilver. . . .It is the dissatisfaction with empiric evidence that make the poet and mystic, for it is the lyric as well as Bacchantic impulse, and although the goat is one of its most immemorial symbols, it must not be confused with mere sexuality. The element is higher and more distilled than that. Its purest form is probably manifested by children and birds in their rhapsodic moments of flight and play. . . . the limitless world of the dream. It is the rosa mystica. . . .[102]

Rowland notes that the goat was associated not only with phallic worship, but also with the Devil. In the Middle Ages, she writes, the billy goat was the Devil's favorite disguise.[103] (She also observes that the medieval bestiarists made a distinction between the lascivious he-goat and the mountain goat. The latter, keen-sighted and fond of mountains, was a symbol of Christ himself. Its acute vision signified God's omniscience and his perception of the Devil's deceits.[104] It is in this context that Williams uses the goat image to refer to Chris Flanders of Milk Train.) Thus in The Rose Tattoo the goat is constantly breaking its rope--to signify a release of passion,

[102]Tennessee Williams, in Vogue (March 15, 1951), p. 96.

[103]Rowland, p. 83.

[104]Ibid., pp. 85-86.

or an escape from inhibition--only to be chased by the Strega (witch, or Devil's disciple) or by the children (rhapsodic flight and play), as Williams mentions above. The goat image has additional meaning, for the horns of the goat signify the horns of the cuckold; thus the goat image is associated at times with Estelle Hohengarten, the woman who has an affair with Serafina's husband Rosario. At the beginning of the play the Assunta is selling a love potion to put in men's coffee which is made of the dried blood of a goat.[105] A few pages later, Estelle, the woman who has cuckolded Serafina, is hiring her to make a shirt--ironically, it is to be a gift from Estelle to Rosario, Serafina's husband. As Estelle talks to Serafina there is the sound of the goat bleating and the jingle of its harness outside; then the crash of wood splintering as the goat escapes. Rosa shouts, "Mama, the black goat is loose!" and stands watching. She is still too young to be anything more than an onlooker at sex. The Strega yells, "Hyeh, Billy, hyeh, hyeh, Billy!" inviting the Devil to strengthen her witchcraft. Serafina screams, "Watch the goat! Don't let him get

[105]Tennessee Williams, The Rose Tattoo (New York: New Directions, 1950), p. 3.

in our yard!" but the warning against sexual betrayal is too late--the goat is already in her yard, and she becomes furious: "Catch him, catch him before he gets at the vines!" She runs into the yard and directs the goat-chase imperiously with her yellow paper fan. The goat evidently makes a sudden charge and Serafina runs screaming back to the front of the house. All this is foreshadowing the destruction of her ideal of love. During the commotion Estelle runs away with a picture of Rosario. The goat is finally captured at the end of the scene. "It is a middlesized black goat with great yellow eyes. The Strega runs behind with the broken rope. As the grotesque little procession runs before her--the Strega, the goat and the children--Serafina cries out shrilly. . . .Shielding her face with one hand, Serafina makes the sign of the horns with the other to ward off the evil eye. . . ."[106] Ironically, this sign of protection is also the sign of the cuckold. Later, in Act II, at the first tender moment between Alvaro and Serafina, the goat breaks loose again. Serafina makes the sign of the horn with her fingers and says: "There is the

[105]Tennessee Williams, The Rose Tattoo (New York: New Directions, 1950), p. 3.

[106]Ibid., pp. 11-14.

Strega! She lets the goat in my yard to eat my tomatoes! She has the eye. . .and so does the goat! The goat has the evil eye, too. He got in my yard the night that I lost Rosario and my boy! Madonna, Madonna mia! Get that goat out of my yard!" She blames the goat for all the evil that has occurred in her life. Who should chase away that evil but Alvaro, who catches the goat and appears around the side of the house with a tight hold on the broken rope around the animal's neck.[107] The goat bleats again when she decides to cut Estelle's heart out with a knife[108]--what else but another phallic symbol! At this point she has accepted the fact that "my husband had put on my head the nanny-goat's horns!"[109] But rather than killing Estelle, she takes what revenge she can on her dead husband: she decides to sleep with Alvaro. As she sends him loudly out of the house so that he can sneak back in to sleep with her without the neighbors knowing, the goat bleats outside.[110] At the end of the play, when the last goat image appears, Williams's ideas about sex remain two-horned; that is, sex solves some of

[107] Ibid., pp. 97-99.

[108] Ibid., p. 119.

[109] Ibid., pp. 118-119.

[110] Ibid., p. 124.

the conflicts, but it also creates others. The protagonists' desires are satisfied, and Alvaro wakes to creep out of the house. He sees Rosa for the first time and outside the goat utters a long "Baaaaaaaa." As if in response, Alvaro whispers, in the same basso key, "Che bella!" The first vowel of "bella" is enormously prolonged like the "baaa" of the goat. The goat bleats again, and Alvaro whispers "Che bella" more loudly, repeating it with antiphonal responses from the goat outside.[111] His lust for the daughter as well as for the mother causes anger and some comic fighting. And although it turns out well, we can see some problems if Rosa continues to live with Alvaro and Serafina.

The widow Serafina is pictured as the individual against society at the beginning of Act II in the play. Society is represented by the children, the neighborhood women, and the priest who comes to call. Serafina is shown to be a trapped beast under attack. At the beginning of the scene a little girl comes up to the porch to stare at the widow "as at a strange beast in a cage."[112] Two ladies come down toward the

[111] Ibid., p. 135.

[112] Ibid., p. 65.

house, and Serafina lurches heavily up to meet them, "like a weary bull turning to face another attack."[113] All day the women have been taking swipes at her with the story about her unfaithful Rosario, and though she has strongly fought against the truth, it is about to kill her. She is at her lowest point in the play. Even the priest, who should offer her comfort, reviles her for her slovenliness and for breaking church law to have her husband cremated. The women whisper and laugh--she calls them squawking hens--mocking her. She contrasts her glorious love with Rosario to what is being said about him, as Williams again deals briefly with the theme of truth and illusion:

> . . .I did, I give him the glory. To me the big bed was beautiful like a religion. Now I lie on it with dreams, with memories only! But it is still beautiful to me. . . .now they can lie because the rose ain't living. They want the marble urn broken; they want me to smash it. They want the rose ashes scattered because I had too much glory. They don't want glory like that in nobody's heart. They want--mouse-squeaking!--known facts.--Who knows the known facts? You--padres--wear black because of the fact that the facts are known by nobody![114]

[113] Ibid., p. 66.

[114] Ibid., pp. 70-73.

The mouse-squeaking facts are very small and insignificant compared to the glory of her illusion. The priest says she's not a woman but an animal, and she replies, "Si, si, animals! Sono animale! Animale. Tell them all, shout it all to them up and down the whole block! The widow Delle Rose is not respectable, she is not even a woman, she is an animal!. . ."[115] Indeed she is, for she lives mainly by her emotions. She had given a "long, animal howl of misery" when she was told of her husband's death.[116] And at the end of play when she gives herself to Alvaro she says, "Sono una bestia, una bestia feroce!" (p. 124). Her behavior seems right when she is not concerning herself with society--what the neighbors may think. She breaks loose, just as the goat does. It is at the lowest point in Serafina's life, when her illusions are smashed, if not the urn which contains her dead husband's ashes, that Alvaro appears on the scene, glossy as a young bull.[117] His behavior may be clownish, but Williams leaves no doubts that his sexuality measures up to Rosario's. Even when he enters the house there is a sexual image--the screen door makes a whining, catlike

[115] Ibid., p. 74.

[116] Ibid., p. 25.

[117] Ibid., p. 76.

noise, swinging shut by degrees.[118] Alvaro is named Mangiacavallo, which means "Eat-a-horse." His day has been as bad as Serafina's: "Eat-a-horse" instead of his name was on his pay envelope, his wages were garnisheed, and he was kicked in the groin by a road-hog salesman all in one day.[119] The clichés, such as road-hog, center around beasts and serve to show contempt: "hay is what horses eat," "How high is this high school?. . .It's as high as that horse's dirt out there in the street;" Guiseppina takes the bull by the horns and demands her daughter's graduation dress, Rosa smashes the piggy bank and says her father saw Serafina "Like this, this pig!"

The rest of the animal images in the play are bird images. The neighbor women flock through like chattering birds to serve as a modern Greek chorus. They are described as clouds of attacking birds which swarm down, sweep about, and scream or squawk.[120] They represent society, and, as such, they are opposed to Serafina and are a representation of evil restrictions upon the heart. It is a concern about what her daughter and the neighbors will think about her sleeping with Alvaro

[118] Ibid., p. 79.

[119] Ibid., p. 84.

[120] Ibid., pp. 19, 24, 143.

which causes the same savage bird to enter Serafina. When she sees him crouched over the couch and her daughter, "she flies at him like a great bird, tearing and clawing at his stupefied figure."[121] She then fruitlessly tries to make Rosa think she does not know Alvaro. The gaudy parrot which Serafina keeps in a brass cage also represents the disapproval of society. When Serafina misses her daughter's graduation and desperately tries to find something to wear, the parrot calls to her and she yells back angrily, "Zitto!"[122] Then when Flora and Bessie (characters right out of "A Perfect Analysis Given by a Parrot") start whispering maliciously about Serafina in front of her, the parrot squawks and Serafina imitates its squawk.[123] The parrot's disapproval increases when Alvaro comes on the scene. It squawks again, and when he sticks his finger in the cage and pokes at it, he gets bitten. Serafina identifies with Alvaro as another individual beset by society, for as he sticks his injured finger in his mouth, she sympathetically puts her corresponding finger, which she had incidentally stuck earlier with a needle, in her mouth.[124] Williams

[121] Ibid., p. 136.

[122] Ibid., p. 32.

[123] Ibid., p. 36.

[124] Ibid., p. 92.

is also able to get in some conversation about sex here: Serafina says the bird is not a she, but a he, and Alvaro replies, "How can you tell with all them tail feathers?" Williams has also used the parrot in the contrast motif with which he decorates the set. The bird, a conventional sex symbol, is contrasted with the large bowl of goldfish, a conventional symbol of Christianity. (Similarly, the female star, Venus, shines overhead, and Botticelli's Venus is recalled in Rosa's lying on the couch; they and the urn of ashes contrast with the shrine to the Virgin Mary in the house. In addition, the two dummies, widow and bride, are contrasted, and even the male palm tree and the female house make a contrast.) Both the parrot and the goldfish are in captivity--limited by society, or perhaps by some self-imposed captivity, such as Serafina's self-imposed celibacy. Serafina is being held captive by the memory of her husband. Alvaro recognizes this when he says that she has put her heart in the marble urn with the ashes:

> And if in a storm sometime, or sometime when a 10-ton truck goes down the highway--the marble urn was to <u>break</u>! [He suddenly points up at the sky.] Look! Look, Baronessa!. . . .I was pointing at your heart, broken out of the urn and away from the ashes!--

> Rondinella felice! [He makes an airy gesture toward the fading sky. . . .He whistles like a bird and makes graceful winglike motions with his hands. He imitates a bird flying off with gay whistles.][125]

The only way to free her is by smashing the memory of Rosario. It is painful for her illusions to be destroyed, but that is the only way she can be freed to live again. She recognizes this herself when she rushes to the Madonna and says, "Ora, ascolta, Signora! You hold in the cup of your hand this little house and you smash it! You break this little house like the shell of a bird in your hand. . . . ."[126] Her belief in her husband is mixed with her belief in the Madonna, and both fall at the same time. As she vehemently denounces the Lady as a poor little doll with peeling paint, the parrot again squawks at her, the goat bleats, the night is full of sinister noises, harsh bird cries, the sudden flapping of wings in the canebrake.[127] It is as if Williams must remind us that when we give up our illusions or our religion or our links with society, the world becomes a violent jungle. There is freedom, yes, but at some risks. She has been a "female ostrich" with the

[125] Ibid., pp. 100-101.

[126] Ibid., p. 124.

[127] Ibid., p. 125.

sheet pulled over her head,[128] but she has no illusions about Alvaro and will be able to fulfill herself with him.

The images that remain to be discussed refer to Jack and Rosa. Rosa's childishness in the first part of the play is presented with insect images--she catches lightning bugs[129] and her mother later notes that she was scratching mosquito bites two weeks before, but now she is grown.[130] In the affair between Rosa and Jack, Williams presents a tender and touching story of the sexual awakening in youth. The two young lovers are free of many symbols. However, a rooster crows all through their scene, symbolizing the awakening of sexual desire, and Jack is said to glare fiercely back at Rosa "like a tiger through the bars of a cage,"[131] his animal passion confined and imprisoned by the promise he has made to Rosa's mother.

The overabundance of symbols tends to oversimplify the action in The Rose Tattoo. Nevertheless, the play has some of the best comic and human moments in the playwright's work.

[128] Ibid., p. 41.

[129] Ibid., pp. 9, 20.

[130] Ibid., p. 58.

[131] Ibid., p. 133.

Camino Real is an amalgam of previous Williamsian images. It is as if Williams selected all the images from his previous writing and pasted them together to create a collage of pasteboard romanticism. This does not mean that it is sloppily or randomly constructed. "On the contrary," he writes in the Foreword, "it is the result of painstaking design, and in this work I have given more conscious attention to form and construction than I have in any work before."[132] This is true. Beneath the appearance of rapid and darting movement, there is a definite structure. The greatest problem of the play, however, is that symbols have been substituted for subtleties in characterization and situation. Williams acknowledged the elaborate use of symbolism in Camino Real and tried to explain its value:

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

[132]Tennessee Williams, "Foreword to Camino Real," reprinted from New York Times (March 15, 1953) in Camino Real (New York: New Directions, 1953), p. vii.

> I hate writing that is a parade of images for the sake of images. . . .But I repeat that symbols, when used respectfully, are the purest language of plays.[133]

His principles are cetainly sound, but he seems to have forgotten to use his symbols respectfully in Camino Real, for too much is a parade of images for the sake of imagery. The message of the play, that of the need for romanticism in the bleak world of reality, appears over and over in symbols. The playwright has constructed another world, a symbolic world, in which "its people are mostly archetypes of certain basic attitudes and qualities."[134] Instead of building a character with flesh and blood complexity, Williams simply has used a known character, fictional or historical, and relies on allusions to do the work for him. This has dulled one of his chief talents, the ability to create believable characters. The characters here are attitudes rather than individuals, and as such they are less ambiguous and complicated than in other plays. In most of his work there is a duality in the images to suggest ambivalence in the characters; there even exists in the presentation of the plays a combination of realism and expressionism.

[133] Ibid., pp. viii-ix.

[134] Ibid., p. vii.

These are the sources of much of the strength and truth in his plays. This is weakened in Camino Real because of the expressionistic mode of presentation. Even in the most realistic of his plays he has rebelled against the literal to reach for the poetic mode of expression. In Camino Real, however, he has cast aside the restrictions of realism which he needs for control. Camino Real, more than any of his other plays, is a personal statement about art, his aesthetic rebellion against realism. He writes in the Afterword:

> My own creed as a playwright is. . .expressed by the painter in Shaw's play The Doctor's Dilemma: "I believe in Michelangelo, Velasquez and Rembrandt; in the might of design, the mystery of color, the redemption of all things by beauty everlasting and the message of art that has made these hands blessed. Amen."
> . . .I feel, as the painter did, that the message [of art] lies in those abstract beauties of form and color and line, to which I would add light and motion.[135]

He adds that the color, the grace and levitation, the structural pattern in motion, and the quick interplay of live beings are the play, and that the dramatic values most important to him are dynamic and organic. It is interesting that he defines

[135]Tennessee Williams, "Afterword," in Camino Real, p. x.

drama as one might define a bird, for it is the image of the bird that is most persistent in Camino Real and throughout all his work. Camino calls for "freedom and mobility of form,"[136] and it was the word "flight" which Williams and director Elia Kazan kept saying to each other--"as if the play were merely an abstraction of the impulse to fly"[137]--to convey the sense of movement and flow they were trying to achieve. Williams uses the terms "release" and "freedom" throughout the Foreword to express his artistic principles; yet these are terms which the characters of Camino, and indeed of all Williams's plays, might use to express their overwhelming desires to escape, to fly from the realities which threaten them. Williams, too, has flown from realism--realism as a medium to present his ideas of truth--as a bird would fly from a cage:

> A cage represents security as well as confinement to a bird that has grown used to being in it; and when a theatrical work kicks over the traces with such apparent insouciance, security seems challenged and, instead of participating in a sense of freedom, one out of a certain number of playgoers will rush back out to the more accustomed implausibility of the street he lives on.[138]

[136] Ibid., p. vii.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Ibid., p. ix.

Reality itself is "implausible"; truth is more readily found in art, the illusion.

Thus Camino Real is illusion, a dream in which the chief animal image is of caged birds. At the beginning the stage is lighted with "flickers of a white radiance as though daybreak were a white bird caught in a net and struggling to rise."[139] Don Quixote, the dreamer, carries a chart which says to halt where the Camino Real becomes the Camino Real, "for the spring of humanity has gone dry in this place and there are no birds in the country except wild birds that are tamed and kept in--Cages!"[140] The luggage which the porters carry is mainly caged birds (p. 79), and Gutman's white cockatoo is another prisoner. Like the captive dawn of the first image, she is called Aurora because she cries only at daybreak,[141] the time when dreams are usually ended. Gutman is constantly hushing her wild and harsh outcries, in a gesture of suppression, but Quixote nods as if in agreement with the outcry.[142] Marguerite considers herself and Jacques caged birds, "Caged birds accept

[139]Williams, Camino, p. 1.

[140]Ibid., p. 5.

[141]Ibid., pp. 3, 7, 69-70.

[142]Ibid., p. 8.

each other but flight is what they long for,"[143] and calls them "a pair of captive hawks caught in the same cage. . .and the perch that we hold is unstable."[144] Esmeralda is compared to a bird broken out of a cage when she bursts out of the Gypsy's establishment, pursued by Nursie, who screams "Where is my lady bird, where is my precious treasure?"[145] Casanova is frequently called a hawk, in reference to his past glory (pp. 65, 69, 71, 97). He bears his hawklike head with a sort of anxious price (p. 8), Marguerite calls him "anxious old hawk,"[146] and Gutman tells him, "Watch out, old hawk, the wind is ruffling your feathers."[147] The imprisoned birds may be the unconscious part of man trying to be released from repression, for in two images they suggest the internal or dark, shadowy nature of man. Marguerite says that the feelings of tenderness between her and Jacques are "the sort of violets that could grow on the moon, or in the crevices of those far away mountains, fertilized by the droppings of carrion birds. Those birds are familiar to

[143] Ibid., p. 71.

[144] Ibid., p. 96.

[145] Ibid., p. 51.

[146] Ibid., p. 65.

[147] Ibid., p. 19.

us. Their shadows inhabit the plaza. I've heard them flapping their wings like old char-women beating worn-out carpets with gray brooms. ..."[148] Jacques has earlier said to her, ". . . over there is Orion, like a fat, golden fish swimming North in the deep clear water, and we are together. . .Not frightened, now, not alone, but completely quietly together. . . .All of us have a desperate bird in our hearts, a memory of--some distant mother with--wings. ..."[149] to quiet her after her futile attempt to board the Fugitivo. Williams used the same bird image in "Two on a Party," but its proximity to the image of the stars as fish further suggests that the image refers to the unconscious. Williams may have borrowed this image from Lorca. Rupert Allen suggests that for Lorca the fish-stars of the night firmament represent points of consciousness against the black sea of the unconscious.[150] He writes that it is easy to see why fish is an appropriate symbol for mediation between the conscious and the unconscious:

> Another Spanish poet, Antonio Machado (1875-1939) describes it clearly (though he is not specifically

[148] Ibid., p. 97.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Allen, p. 58.

> concerned with the problem of psychological integration) in a poem which begins, "There are two modes of consciousness." The two modes are, of course, intellect and intuition; the intuitive man is (says Machado) a "visionary who looks into the deep aquarium and sees living fish," while the intellectual man is a fisherman who always ends up "throwing the dead fish on the sand." Fish in the ocean, like shimmering stars in the night sky, are strongly suggestive of individual psychic units.[151]

Jacques, then, and all romantics, are the visionaries of the world, seeking to integrate consciousness and unconsciousness and to unify the fragmentary elements in their minds.

Williams's concern with the work of the artist and his use of the psychoanalyst as a symbol for those who attempt to put the pieces of a shattered world back together are persistent themes in his work. He uses the insect image to reinforce the theme of fragmentation and the artist's quest for unity or purity from the chaos. Lord Byron, the epitome of romantic poets, describes the burning of Shelley's body in contradictory terms: "Shelley's burning was finally very pure! But the body, the corpse, split open like a grilled pig!"[152] The atonement is pure, but the reality of the body is fragmented, split

[151] Ibid., pp. 58-59.

[152] Williams, Camino Real, p. 75.

in two, and dirty as a pig. Byron himself has lost the old pure song in the Camino Real. He says that perhaps when he leaves, "the old pure music will come to me again. Of course on the other hand I may hear only the little noise of insects in the grass. . ."[153] Retreat into imagination may result in artistic creation; but it may also result in insanity or destruction. The Fugitivo, the airplane which offers escape from the Camino Real, turns out to be only an illusory escape, for its receding roar diminishes to the hum of an insect (p. 93) and it crashes, destroying all the passengers. Further insect images appear when the Dantean descent into hell reaches its climax in the ritual of the restoration of the gypsy's daughter's virginity. At the beginning of the ceremony, weird-looking celebrants creep into the plaza, silently as spiders descending a wall (p. 99). Casanova is then crowned king of the cuckolds with gilded antlers, and he joins Kilroy, with his patsy outfit (the nose of which goes on and off like a firefly[154]), as an object of ridicule. Williams reverses the images of the antlered stag and the firefly, his personal symbol of freedom

[153] Ibid., p. 78.

[154] Ibid., p. 54.

and innocence, to show the loss of dignity suffered by these two men.

Images of other beasts are typical Williamsian symbols. For example, Gutman calls the sun "that angry old lion" which looked back once, growled, and then went switching its tail toward the cool shade of the Sierras (p. 15). The other cat images are associated with Esmeralda and Kilroy and have sexual connotations. Kilroy is a tom-cat[155] without a home for whom Esmeralda asks the blessing of God. Esmeralda is the pussy who plays while the old mother cat, the Gypsy, is away (p. 134). The images of dogs appear as outcasts, such as the parish dogs which are dying in the starving country,[156] or small, dirty, sneaking animals, such as Abdullah, who is described "as dodging in and out like a little terrier."[157] Early in the play, old Prudence Duvernoy is searching for her lost poodle and is crouched over the filthy gray bundle of a dying mongrel by the fountain. Jacques says, "It is a terrible thing for an old woman to outlive her dogs." Then he takes the dog

[155] Ibid., pp. 117, 155-157.

[156] Ibid., pp. 15, 19.

[157] Ibid., p. 98.

from her grasp and tells her that we sometimes find things changed when we wake.[158] His comment emphasizes the dream-like nature of the play. Williams also briefly mentions rats and guinea pigs. Don Quixote, the dreamer, is dressed like an old desert rat (p. 4), and the manager of the fleabag hotel is A. Ratt (p. 34). The former image emphasizes the ability of survival in creatures such as desert rats and dreamers; the latter is used in the conventional sense of an unsavory cheat. The image of the guinea pig is used in the Gypsy's picture of God: "Don't kid yourself. We're all of us guinea pigs in the laboratory of god. Humanity is just a work in progress."[159] This ironic view of God as a super scientist and the creation as an experiment is an expression of Williams's deterministic view of the universe. Another opinion of God is expressed by the survivor, who says,

> I once had a pony named Peeto. He caught in his nostrils the scent of thunderstorms coming even before the clouds had crossed the Sierra. . . . When Peeto, my pony, was born--he stood on his four legs at once, and accepted the world!--He was wiser than I. . . .--When Peeto was one year

[158] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[159] Ibid., p. 113.

> old he was wiser than God! "Peeto, Peeto!" the Indian boys called after him trying to stop him--trying to stop the wind![160]

Peeto the pony appears in "The Purification," where he represents freedom and intense desires. The same complex meanings apply here, where the horse represents what is natural, unconscious, or instinctive. Cirlot notes that the horse may represent blind forces and also the clairvoyant, magic side of man, his intuitive understanding.[161] By endowing Peeto with wisdom greater than God's, the survivor seems to say that acceptance of the world is the key to its mysteries. This view of God may be further explained by a comment Jacques makes about the horses which Camille had to put up for sale at auction: "All these things are dreams."[162] Thus the play, the universe, and God Himself may be but dreams.

The dreamlike illusion of the play is supported by further bird imagery. Marguerite escapes reality "upstairs where it's cool and there's music and the haggling of the bazaar is soft as the murmur of pigeons."[163] Reality for her has been a

[160] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[161] Cirlot, pp. 144-145.

[162] Williams, Camino, p. 11.

[163] Ibid., p. 66.

tuberculosis sanatarium, an image of death, in which she received postcard bluebirds that say "Get well Quick!" from friends who used to write ten-page letters. Both patient and friend know that getting well quick is impossible, for the bluebird, according to Cirlot, is a symbol of the impossible.[164] All the characters seem to be dreaming. Kilroy thinks he is dreaming when he sees Esmeralda with the glittering emerald snakes coiled over her breasts; his head moves in a dizzy circle and a canary warbles inside it (p. 117). But perhaps Williams is hopeful for some escape from this nightmare on the Camino Real, for several characters are successful in their quest to find a way out. Jacques and Marguerite find each other; Kilroy is resurrected; and Quixote awakes from his dream with "a mouthfull of old chicken feathers"[165] to escape the Camino Real with Kilroy. Kilroy's resurrection has been foreshadowed throughout the play by a phoenix painted on silk which is on a large wall behind the balcony. Williams writes that the phoenix "should be softly lighted now and then in the play, since resurrections are so much a part of its meaning."[166] The phoenix may be the bird the Madrecita has in mind when she refers to Kilroy's

[164]Cirlot, p. 26.

[165]Williams, Camino, p. 158.

[166]Ibid., p. 1.

spirit: "Rise, ghost! Go! Go, bird!"[167]

Camino Real, though less successful than some of Williams's major plays, is probably the best play for finding the major concerns of the playwright: his themes of illusion vs. reality, of loneliness, of the role of the artist-dreamer-man in society; his techniques of piecing drama together from fragments of images; and his use of familiar, personally meaningful images.

The animal imagery in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof centers around the characters. The characters in this play are living and vital flesh and blood--not the storybook paperdolls of Camino Real--and thus the images serve to define character.

The world of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is a world of mendacity and hypocrisy with which even the minor characters are infected. Doc Baugh and the Reverend Tooker are deceivers. The clergyman is one of Williams's most scathing portraits of petty viciousness in the guise of humility. Williams describes him as entering with a fatuous clergyman's smile, "sincere as a bird call blown on a hunter's whistle, the living embodiment

[167] Ibid., p. 150.

of the pious, conventional lie."[168] The presence of Mae and Gooper and their children is a hypocritical charade; they are there not to celebrate Big Daddy's birthday but, rather, to get some of the cash on his death day. The children are comical horrors. Big Daddy says to put the pigs--the children--at a trough in the kitchen, and Maggie continues the image by saying, "They've brought the whole bunch down here like animals to display at a county fair."[169] Their very presence, of course, is a comment on Maggie's barrenness. She says that the children all have dog's names: "Dixie, Trixie, Buster, Sonny, Polly!--Sounds like four dogs and a parrot. . .animal acts in a circus!"[170] This is the most apt image for them since they spend the evening performing tricks for Big Daddy's amusement (he is not amused) at Mae's coaching. Big Daddy has to lie and pretend to love them:

> Pretend to love that son of a bitch of a Gooper and his wife Mae and those five same screechers out there like parrots in a jungle?. . . .I hate Gooper an' Mae an' know that they hate me, and since all five

[168]Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof in The Theatre of Tennessee Williams, III (New York: New Directions, 1971), 116.

[169]Ibid., p. 19.

[170]Ibid., p. 37.

> same monkeys are little Maes an'Goopers. . . .I hate Gooper and his five same monkeys and that bitch Mae.[171]

During the climactic confrontation between Brick and Big Daddy, one of the children, a little girl, bursts into the room, hops and shrieks like a monkey gone mad, and rushes back out again.[172] Thus Big Daddy's offspring offer him no comfort, only distraction and interruption. Mae and Gooper are interested only in Big Daddy's plantation; they watch his face like hawks[173] to detect any signs that he might give them a share. Like hawks, they would devour the spoils of his death. Big Mama is animal like. She huffs and puffs like an old bulldog,[174] enters the room like a charging rhino,[175] and even her dress has a large black and white pattern "like the markings of some massive animal."[176] Big Daddy refers to her in animal terms. He tells her to "quit horsin'"[177] and says she went wild buying things

[171] Ibid., pp. 108, 110.

[172] Ibid., p. 100.

[173] Ibid., p. 24.

[174] Ibid., p. 42.

[175] Ibid., p. 65.

[176] Ibid., p. 66.

[177] Ibid., p. 67.

when they were in Europe--he could not hold her with a mule's harness.[178] She understands the animal activities of her husband--she admiringly exclaims that he ate like "a hawss" at supper[179]--but only the animal activities.

The coarse joke about the elephant's phallus,[180] which was added to the Broadway version, serves to emphasize the animal nature of Big Daddy. He is huge, obese, vulgar, and powerful. His conception of man is as an animal:

> . . .The human animal is a selfish beast. . . .the human animal is a beast that dies but the fact that he's dying don't give him pity for others, no, sir, ...--the human animal is a beast that dies and if he's got money he buys and buys and buys and I think the reason he buys everything he can buy is that in the back of his mind he has the crazy hope that one of his purchases will be life everlasting! --Which it never can be. . . .The human animal is a beast that--[181]
>
> --When you are gone from here, boy, you are long gone and no where! 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

[178] Ibid., p. 86.

[179] Ibid., p. 130.

[180] Ibid., p. 206.

[181] Ibid., pp. 87-89.

> lot more complicated and consequently more trouble to keep together. . . .[182]

Big Daddy recognizes one difference between men and animals--men can see their approaching death:

> A pig squeals. A man keeps a tight mouth about it, in spite of a man not having a pig's advantage. . . . Ignorance--of mortality--is a comfort. A man don't have that comfort, he's the only living thing that conceives of death, that knows what it is. The others go without knowing which is the way that anything living should go, without knowing, without any knowledge of it, and yet a pig squeals. . . .[183]

By this Brick and the audience know that Big Daddy would rather not know of his approaching death. He would rather be deceived; he would rather live with mendacity, "there's nothing _else_ to _live_ with except mendacity, is there?"[184] Implicit in this statement is the idea that life may be unfair and dirty but it is life nevertheless and must be lived. He represents the energy of life. In this, he and Maggie are identical.

Maggie emphatically affirms this idea: _I'm alive_! Maggie

[182] _Ibid_., p. 101.

[183] _Ibid_., p. 91.

[184] _Ibid_., p. 109.

the cat is--alive! I am alive, alive! I am. . .--alive!"[185] Escaping life the way Brick does through liquor is not for her; she is a fighter. As she says,

> One thing I don't have is the charm of the defeated, my hat is still in the ring, and I am determined to win!. . . .--What is the victory of a cat on a hot tin roof?--I wish I knew. . . .Just staying on it, I guess, as long as she can. . . .[186]

She is the fighter, the cat, for three reasons: she has been "poor as Job's turkey"[187] all her life and sees her marriage as an end to poverty; she is jealous of the fertility of Mae and Gooper; and she is sexually frustrated by Brick's coolness to her. When she repeats that she feels like a cat on a hot tin roof, Brick tells her, "Then jump off the roof, jump off it, cats can jump off roofs and land on their four feet uninjured!" and he tells her to take a lover.[188] But she is too tenacious to jump off, although she is miserable on it. Here is the free, vital animal nature. She plans to go deer hunting

[185] Ibid., p. 60.

[186] Ibid., p. 31.

[187] Ibid., p. 53.

[188] Ibid., p. 39.

with Brick because "I love to run with dogs through chilly woods, run, run leap over obstructions--"[189] Her passionate, hot nature demands that she speak the unspeakable, so she tries to force Brick to discuss Skipper, to make him understand the hold he had on Brick, so that Brick will be free to come to bed with her:

> --When I came to his room that night, with a little scratch like a shy little mouse at his door, he made that pitiful, ineffectual little attempt to prove that what I had said wasn't true. . . .
> --In this way, I destroyed him, by telling him truth that he and his world. . .had told him could not be told?. . . .
> --Who shot cock robin? I with my--. . .--merciful arrow.'[190]

It is hard to imagine Maggie the cat as a shy little mouse. Indeed, one of the problems of the play is Maggie's assumption that because Skipper failed to make love to her, he was a homosexual. Whether or not he was a homosexual--from all indications he was--the fact that he failed to prove himself in bed, especially after a night of drinking and dejection, seems a very thin one on which to base such a suspicion. If her attempts

[189] Ibid., p. 36.

[190] Ibid., p. 59.

to get Skipper to make love to her were similar to her attempts to get Brick to make love, she was certainly not mouselike; when she advances toward Brick, he seizes a small chair and raises it like a lion-tamer facing a big circus cat.[191] This fierceness in Maggie could have been the cause of Skipper's failure. Her comment about cock robin shows her again in the role of pursuer, hunter, like a cat. Something could be made, perhaps, of the fact that she is a good hunter and has an archer's license; she even won a Diana Trophy at an intercollegiate archery contest. She views sex as the determining factor in her relationship with Brick. Her pursuit of Brick follows conventional symbology of the cat, for the female cat was said by Aristotle to be particularly lecherous and wheedle the male on to sexual activity.[192] Brick's indifference to her has made her tense, and her anxiety is noticeable--Brick and Big Daddy comment that both Mae and Maggie look nervous as a couple of cats on a hot tin roof--ready to scratch each other's eyes out.[193] Margaret's catlike tension has made her shrill,

[191] Ibid., p. 41.

[192] Rowland, p. 52.

[193] Williams, Cat, pp. 79-80.

hysterical, and catty. She tells Brick she is catty to Mae because she is consumed with envy and eaten up with longing.[194] Mae provides further reason for Maggie to stay on the roof, spitting and clawing to protect Brick's property rights. Thus, though she is honest about her relationship with Brick and about Brick's relationship with Skipper, she is motivated for her big lie about the expected baby. She is sure, and the audience is expected to be sure as well, that a single night's sexual union with Brick will produce a child. Here is a one-dimensional view of sex. As Nelson has pointed out, to her "too many really important things. . .depend upon the success or apparent lack of success of a single copulation."[195] As Brick says, "Y'know, I think that Maggie has always felt sort of left out because she and me never got any closer together than two people just get in bed, which is not much closer than two cats on a--fence humping. . . ."[196]

The hot cat symbol for Maggie is contrasted with the cool moon symbol for Brick. He is constantly attempting to leave the house, to go out on the terrace and gaze at the moon while

[194] Ibid., p. 38.

[195] Nelson, pp. 209-210.

[196] Williams, Cat, p. 123.

he waits for the peaceful "click" that occurs after he has drunk enough. Margaret determinedly tries to keep him inside, facing the light of truth, in the first act, and Big Daddy continues the struggle in the second. Both are desperately attempting to keep him from escaping the truth about himself; from leaving the house forever for the detachment of the cool moon and the serene "click." Maggie and Big Daddy are willing to admit the evil in themselves and in the world. Brick cannot stand the truth about Skipper, or more important, about himself. He had idealized their relationship so that the dream was more important than the reality. Brick says that he cannot face lies, but in reality he cannot face truth. Big Daddy and Maggie, although they are enmeshed in the viciousness and hypocrisy of the situation, manifest love and courage as they face the simplest truth: that there is meaning in life, that detachment is no resolution. They recognize that any relationship has flaws or frailties; Brick cannot. He idealizes his relationship with Skipper into such a pure "one great true thing," an abstract devotion, that it lacks the factor essential to any human relationship--warmth. Maggie realizes this lack and the fact that no one could live up to Brick's ideal when she says,

> It was one of those beautiful, ideal things they tell about in the Greek legends, it couldn't be anything else, you being you. . . .My only point. . . is life has got to be allowed to continue even after the dream of life is--all--over. . . .I'm naming it so damn clean that it killed poor Skipper! --You two had something that had to be kept on ice, yes, incorruptible, yes!--and death was the only icebox where you could keep it.[198]

Like the Brick of "Three Players of a Summer Game," and other Williamsian moth-characters, he is attempting to escape "out of something unbearably hot and bright into something obscure and cool. . ."[199]

Williams has been applauded for his "unusual ingenuity in the manipulation of cliché,"[200] and he uses this talent well in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. The storm, which the playwright added to the Broadway version of Act III, is filled with the animal sounds of barnyard animals in terror and dogs howling. It echoes the storm inside the house.[201] Most of the cliché are

[198]Ibid., pp. 57-58.

[199]Williams, "Three Players of a Summer Game," One Arm, p. 17.

[200]Tischler, p. 175.

[201]Williams's use of this pathetic fallacy, plus his most conventional use of the three act form, his technique of presenting the action in a single night, and his presentation of a protagonist, make this his most classic play.

in the mouth of Mae or Big Daddy. Mae says that mosquitoes are eating them alive,[202] but the mosquitoes may represent all the pettiness of greed and hypocrisy which distinguish her. At the end, as Mae and Gooper leave Brick and Maggie to their night of lovemaking, Mae says, "Come along and leave these lovebirds together in their nest."[203] Of course, this is said ironically, for she is as aware as the audience that Brick and Maggie have no lovenest. Williams has earlier described the room as "a great aviary of chattering birds."[204] Big Daddy, whose pain is "fox-teeth in his guts,"[205] is said to grin wolfishly. He utters most of the clichés. He tells of the children in Spain begging like starving dogs with their howls and screeches: "Hell, I threw them money like you'd scatter feed corn for chickens."[206] Brick's restlessness--he calls himself a restless cripple--is described by Big Daddy as ants in his britches.[207]

[202]Williams, Cat, p. 72.

[203]Ibid., p. 161. She adds "nest of lice" in the Broadway version (p. 213.).

[204]Ibid., pp. 65, 134.

[205]Ibid., pp. 67, 92.

[206]Ibid., p. 87.

[207]Ibid., p. 97.

He tells Brick about the two old men who owned the plantation before he took it over, saying, "When Jack Straw died--why old Peter Ochello quit eatin' like a dog does when it's master's dead, and died, too!"[208] He says this to tell Brick that he understands about the strength of a homosexual attachment. And although Brick has not stopped eating, he has started drinking.

Williams has been criticized for the ambiguity in the play. Just as Big Daddy is stripping away the facade and baring the crucial questions behind Brick's emotional paralysis, Brick switches to the subject of Big Daddy's cancer. He never faces his own responsibility for Skipper's death; there is no further mention of his problem. Williams explains this at the beginning of the scene:

> The bird that I hope to catch in the net of this play is not the solution of one man's psychological problem. I'm trying to catch the true quality of experience in a group of people, that cloudy, flickering, evanescent--fiercely charged!--interplay of live human beings in the thundercloud of a common crisis. Some mystery should be left in the revelation of character in a play, just as a great deal of mystery is always left in the revelation of character in life, even in one's own character to himself. This does not absolve the

[208] Ibid., p. 117.

> playwright of his duty to observe and probe as clearly and deeply as he legitimately can: but it should steer him away from "pat" conclusions, facile definitions which make a play just a play, not a snare for the truth of human experience.[209]

Ambiguity is at the root of all Williams's work; many of the animal images which he selects convey a sense of several opposing meanings. But rather than being a weakness, as some critics imply by their comments, it is a strength. It is central to Williams's own world view, and he cannot, without betraying his own values, remove such ambivalence from his work. It is his reality, his truth, and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is his healthiest, most positive statement on behalf of truth.

In his introduction to Orpheus Descending and Battle of Angels, published together in 1955, Williams defines the thematic purposes underlying both plays:

> On its surface it was and still is the tale of a wild-spirited boy who wanders into a conventional community of the South and creates the commotion of a fox in a chicken coop.
>
> But beneath that now familiar surface it is a play about unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people and the difference between continuing to ask them, a difference represented by the four major protagonists of the play, and the

[209] Ibid., pp. 114-115.

> acceptance of prescribed answers that are not answers at all, but expedient adaptations or surrender to a state of quandary.[210]

Both plays and the motion picture The Fugitive Kind, whose only change from the script of Orpheus Descending is the title, are on the most obvious plot level a retelling of D. H. Lawrence's "The Fox." The "fox in a chicken coop" is Val Xavier, who is twice linked to the Lawrence image of the fox: he says he was tired of being lonesome and wanted to feel like he belonged somewhere "instead of like a fox that's chased by hounds,"[211] and that his folks were loose chicken feathers blown around by the wind, causing him to live by himself "like a fox."[212] But unlike the Lawrencean foxes, Val is a reluctant fox, pursued by rather than pursuing the women in his life. Benjamin Nelson notes that Val, beneath all his symbolic trappings of virility, is, like Brick Pollitt, the strangely passive male who is acted upon more than he acts.

> His latent animal force makes him a source of attraction, but he is one of the most unwilling foxes ever

[210]Tennessee Williams, "The Past, the Present and the Perhaps," introduction to Orpheus Descending with Battle of Angels (New York: New Directions, 1955), p. vi.

[211]Williams, Battle of Angels, p. 165.

[212]Ibid., p. 167.

> to find himself in a hen house. He regards his position in life as that of a stud, and he abhors it. Like Brick he is not only reluctant but almost averse to playing the role of the heterosexual male, so much so that although he has obviously been luring Lady--whether consciously or unconsciously--it is she who leads him by the hand into the small side room where they become lovers.[213]

And although the plot professes to follow Lawrence in his belief in the need for a more natural and intense approach to sex, sexuality in the Orpheus plays is conspicuously tinged with decay and destruction. The snakeskin jacket, too, has its Lawrencean counterpart, but Williams's use of this symbol does not entirely reflect Lawrence's use of it. Lawrence uses the snake to symbolize a desirable state of vibrant aliveness--a deliberate reversal of the traditional Judeo-Christian conception of the reptile--in his poem "Snake." Lawrence considers his snake "like a god," "like a king in exile," "one of the lords of life"; and so it is that the snake-like Val is to be considered (there is abundant Christ symbolism in reference to Val). At the end of Orpheus, when the Conjure Man holds up Val's snakeskin jacket, Carol (Sandra) makes a remark which might refer to Val's fox, as well as his snake, attributes:

[213]Nelson, p. 231.

"Wild things leave skins behind them, they leave clean skins and teeth and white bones behind them and these are tokens passed from one to another, so that the fugitive kind can always follow their kind. . . ."[214] Since snakes shed their skins, they represent physical rebirth, and this skin, which always remains clean, represents purity as well. Williams uses the snake image more ambiguously than Lawrence, however, because he has his conventional characters who represent conventional society refer to it in its evil connotations. For example, in the confrontation between Val and the men of the town one man says when he sees a snake he gets a good fork stick to pin it down and then he smashes it under the heel of his boot, "I scotch its goddam yellow gizzards out!"[215] And in the epilogue of Battle of Angels the newspaper woman calls Val's jacket a souvenir of the jungle, "a shameless, flaunting symbol of the Beast Untamed!"[216] Carol and the newspaper woman see the same thing--freedom from restraint and convention--but their opinions about freedom are opposed. The snake as a symbol

[214]Williams, Orpheus Descending, p. 117.

[215]Williams, Battle, p. 186.

[216]Ibid., p. 236.

of freedom is confirmed when Val refuses to "take off his snakeskin wildness for the convict's uniform" of matrimony, and when Sandra (Carol) outlines the pattern of her unorthodoxy with the account of the Cassandra of ancient Greece:

> Her ears were snake-bitten, like mine, so that she could understand the secret language of the birds. You know what they told her, Snakeskin? They contradicted everything that she'd been told before. They said it was all stuff an' nonsense, a pack of lies. They advised her to drive her car as fast as she wanted to drive it, to dance like she wanted to dance. Get drunk, they said, raise hell at Moon Lake casina, do bumps an' wiggle your fanny![217]

Sandra's speech is replaced in Orpheus with Carol's questioning Val about meeting him before. She remembers the jacket and a snake ring with a ruby or emerald or diamond eye, but he denies ever having had one. She says that she tried to pick him up, she touched his snakeskin jacket, and she said, "What on earth can you do on this earth but catch at whatever comes near you, with both your hands, until your fingers are broken?"[218] Whatever it is that Carol/Sandra is catching at is the same thing that Williams was discussing in his introduction to the

[217] Ibid., p. 135.

[218] Williams, Orpheus, pp. 20-21.

play: the unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people. Val was waiting to catch the same intangible, waiting for an answer, waiting for something to happen when as a boy of fourteen he had his first girl:

> What does anyone wait for? For something to happen, for anything to happen, to make things make more sense. . . .Does everything stop because you don't get the answer? No, it goes right on as if the answer was given. . . .And then--well--then. . ... You get the make-believe answer. . . .
> LADY:--Love?
> VAL: That's the make-believe answer. . . .--I met a girl on the bayou when I was fourteen. I'd had a feeling that day that. . .I would come bang into whatever it was I'd been so long expecting! . . . /She came/ out on the dogtrot of a cabin as naked as I was in the flat-bottom boat! She stood there a while with the daylight burning around her. . . . Oh, God, I remember a bird flown out of the moss and its wings made a shadow on her, and then it sung a single, high clear note, and as if she was waiting for that as a kind of a signal to catch me, she turned and smiled, and walked on back in the cabin. . . .
> LADY: You followed?
> VAL: Yes, I followed, I followed, like a bird's tail follows a bird, I followed!
> I thought that she give me the answer to the question, I'd been waiting for, but afterwards I wasn't sure that was it, but from that time the question wasn't much plainer than the answer. . . .[219]

After that he sold diamondback and alligator skins and other wild things' skins he caught on the bayou, but he soon learned

[219]Ibid., pp. 47-49; Battle, pp. 168-169.

he had other things to sell--"I was corrupted." In the work of Williams, unlike that of Lawrence, sex has a shadow over it, it is corrupted and corrupting; and, as Val says here, it is not the answer to the basic questions of life. In this passage the image of the snakeskin takes on an ironic texture. The snakeskin has represented freedom so far; but as Val talks about human loneliness, the image of skin symbolizes the opposite: "Nobody ever gets to know no body! We're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life!. . .we're under a lifelong sentence to solitary confinement inside our own lonely skins for as long as we live on this earth!"[220] For Val, sex is not enough; he needs some profound communication with other individuals. And for Williams, this idea was sufficiently important for him to refer to it years later in his introduction to Cat:

> It is sad and embarrassing and unattractive that those emotions that stir [the artist] deeply enough to demand expression. . .are nearly all rooted. . . in the particular and sometimes peculiar concerns of the artist himself, that special world, the passions and images of it that each of us weaves about him from birth to death, a web of monstrous complexity, spun forth at a speed that is incalcu-

[220] Ibid., p. 47.

> lable to a length beyond measure, from the spider mouth of his own singular perceptions.
>
> It is a lonely idea, a lonely condition, so terrifying to think of that we usually don't. And so we talk to each other, write and wire each other, call each other. . ., fight each other and even destroy each other because of this always somewhat thwarted effort to break through walls to each other. As a character in a play once said, "We're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins."
>
> Personal lyricism is the outcry of prisoner to prisoner from the cell in solitary where each is confined for the duration of his life.[221]

This stark and lonely condition of man has obsessed Williams in all his work. In the relationship between Val and Myra/Lady there is the desperate mutual need for love arising not from any consuming passion, but from the desire not to be lonely. Here, as in The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire, a tender and true relationship is created out of deep personal loneliness, and the relationship is denied by outside forces, which are corrupt. Corruption extends to all phases of life; whatever is living is seen as capable of being corrupted and destroyed. Lady/Myra is desperately in need of deliverance from corruption, but her Christ-Orpheus figure Val is too

[221]Tennessee Williams, "Person--to--Person," introduction to Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: New Directions, 1971), p. 3.

detached, too aloof to extricate her. He does not want to become involved, and does not actively take part in the situation. His sense of aloofness is clearly illustrated in the passage where he tells Lady about a legless bird he had once seen.

> VAL: You know they's a kind of bird that don't have legs so it can't light on nothing but has to stay all its life on its wings in the sky? That's true. I seen one once, it had died and fallen to earth and it was light-blue colored and its body was tiny as your little finger, that's the truth, it had a body as tiny as your little finger and so light on the palm of your hand it didn't weigh more than a feather, but its wings spread out this wide but they was transparent, the color of the sky and you could see through them. That's what they call protection coloring. Camouflage, they call it. You can't tell those birds from the sky and that's why the hawks don't catch them, don't see them up there in the high blue sky near the sun!
> LADY: How about in gray weather?
> VAL: They fly so high in gray weather the Goddam hawks would get dizzy. But those little birds, they don't have no legs at all and they live their whole lives on the wing, and they sleep on the wind, that's how they sleep at night, they just spread their wings and go to sleep on the wind like other birds fold their wings and go to sleep on a tree. . . .--They sleep on the wind and. . .--never light on this earth but one time when they die!
> LADY:--I'd like to be one of those birds.
> VAL: So'd I like to be one of those birds; they's lots of people would like to be one of those birds and never be--corrupted!
> LADY: If one of those birds ever dies and falls on the ground and you happen to find it, I wish you would show it to me because I think maybe you just imagine

> there is a bird of that kind in existence. Because I don't think nothing living has ever been that free, not even nearly. Show me one of them birds and I'll say, Yes, God's made one perfect creature! --I sure would give this mercantile store and every bit of stock in it to be that tiny bird the color of the sky. . .for one night to sleep on the wind and--float!--around under th'--stars. . . .[222]

The image of the legless bird appeared as the rondini in The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone to contrast with her corrupted world. The image is expanded here, but serves the same function. Val Xavier is almost one of those birds, as Lady makes clear when she says, "This boy is a bird with no feet so he has to sleep on the wind."[223] His flaw is that he must land. Unlike the little bird, he cannot fight the loneliness of the world near the life-giving sun, and in reaching out to an equally lonely Eurydice, is drawn to the corrupt world and his death. The bird, though it represents purity and freedom from the world's taint, or even the deity, is a bird of camouflage, and Lady is doubtful that it even exists. Thus, the bird is illusion, and the search for beauty, purity, and wonder which is suggested by its flight is turned to ash by the merciless flame of life, the

[222] _____, Orpheus, pp. 41-42.

[223] Ibid., p. 79.

world that destroys the lost and the sensitive. This bird is like the bluebird pictured on the "Welcome Sweet Springtime" sign in the confectionery shop: According to Cirlot, the bluebird is a symbol of the impossible, like blue roses.[224] The same idea appears in the little glass birds with which Lady decorated the barren fig tree that finally bore fruit in her father's orchard. Like the legless bird, it is transparent and can be seen through, fragile and easily broken. Lady's pregnancy is greeted with joy in a lyric passage:

> LADY:. . .
> --It seemed such a wonderful thing, after those ten barren springs, for the little fig tree to bear, it called for a celebration--I ran to a closet, I opened a box that we kept Christmas ornaments in!--I took them out, glass bells, glass birds, tinsel, icicles, stars. . . .And I hung the little tree with them, I decorated the fig tree with glass bells and glass birds, and silver icicles and stars, because it won the battle and it would bear!. . .Unpack the box! Unpack the box with the Christmas ornaments in it, put them on me, glass bells and glass birds and stars and tinsel and snow!. . . .[225]

Her dream of sexual fulfillment and fertility is quickly shattered, as fragile as the glass bird ornaments she uses to

[224]Cirlot, p. 26.

[225]Williams, Orpheus, p. 114.

decorate herself. It is interesting that the alcove where Lady and Val conceive the child is covered with a curtain that has a bizarre pattern of a gold tree with scarlet fruit and white birds in it.[226] The bird image likewise appears as a symbol of freedom, sexuality, and fragility in reference to Carol. Val says that the weight of a man on her would break her: "Little girl, you're transparent, I can see the veins in you. A man's weight on you would break you like a bundle of sticks. . . ." When she replies that he is right, that love-making is unbearably painful to her but that she does bear it in order not to be alone, he says, "Well, then, fly away, little bird, fly away before you--get broke."[227]

Other bird images in the Orpheus series take on even more sinister connotations. In two separate images they may represent time and the destruction of time. Carol says that the dead on Cypress Hill chatter together like birds, saying, "Live, live, live, live, live!" It is all they have learned, the only advice they can give.[228] Myra refers to the passage of time as

[226]Ibid., p. 81. The alcove, according to Nancy Tischler, represents the womb, which has been locked but is broken open by Val (p. 80).

[227]Ibid., p. 58.

[228]Ibid., p. 28.

pigeon tracks--in 10,000 years she and Val will be just telltale marks on the sides of rocks, "teeny-weeny little pencil scratches, things like pigeon tracks will be what's left of Myra--what's left of Val!"[229] Myra's past love is recalled in the scene when her old lover, David Anderson, enters the store to buy cartridges so he can go out to shoot wild birds. The scene is punctuated by a rooster crowing longingly at the sun. Besides being a stock sexual image, the rooster is used ironically to represent the death of desire, or the barrenness of both David's and Myra's lives because they have sold out their true love. The rooster crows at sunset instead of at sunrise, to herald the end of love, just as David is shooting the free wild bird of first love. Myra says, "That rooster always crows about sundown. Sounds like he's remembering something. [Jabe knocks on the ceiling.] I wonder if he is."[230] The rooster crows mournfully again, just in case someone in the audience missed the symbolism of the first two times. Death symbolism is even more pronounced in Williams's use of buzzards, which is associated with the play's strongest death symbol,

[229]Williams, Battle, p. 196.

[230]Ibid., pp. 174-176.

Jabe. Sandra takes a pot shot at a buzzard, saying "A bird of ill omen was circling over the store";[231] and at the end of the play Jabe finally makes his entrance, yelling "Buzzards! Buzzards!" at Myra/Lady and Val.[232] The buzzards, along with the cancer which is eating away Jabe's life, represent corruption. They symbolize the corruption in the community, which is also feeding on the disease of bigotry, envy and hatred. The people in the community are also represented with bird images. Blanch and Eva gloat over the prospect of Jabe's illness, and Carol comments, "Aren't they delightful. The little white doves of the Lord."[233] The men of the town scornfully call Val a "redneck peckerwood with a nawthun edjication."[234] When the women of the town gossip about Carol or Lady, they are said to sound like hissing geese,[235] which implies foolishness as well as viciousness.

Violence in the community is represented by dogs. When Dolly and Beulah gossip in the prologue about Jabe's leading

[231] Ibid., pp. 136-137.

[232] Orpheus, p. 115; Battle, pp. 230-232.

[233] Battle, p. 159.

[234] Ibid., pp. 186, 188.

[235] Orpheus, pp. 28, 55.

the gang that burned Lady's father and his wine orchards, dogs bay in the distance.[236] The sound of the baying dogs gets nearer when Val helps Vee Talbott articulate the reasons she paints. Before she painted, existence made no sense because as the sheriff's wife she saw horrors, such as chain-gang dogs tearing fugitive convicts to pieces. A moment later the sound of wild baying is heard:

> LADY: The chain-gang dogs are chasing some runaway convict. . . .
> VAL: Run boy! Run fast, brother! If they catch you, you never will run again! That's--. . .--for sure. . . .[The baying of the dogs changes, becomes almost a single savage note.]--Uh-huh--the dogs've got him. . . .They're tearing him to pieces! [Pause. Baying continues. A shot is fired. The baying dies out. . . .][237]

The dogs bark in the distance to suggest the scene of the pursuit of the fugitive when Sheriff Talbott tells Val to get out of town; he hopes Val will get out, he says, because he dislikes violence. As he goes outside, dogs bark and minor guitar music, "Dog Howl Blues," is heard.[238] Rowland notes that "there is scarcely a country that does not possess a

[236] Ibid., p. 9.

[237] Ibid., p. 70.

[238] Ibid., pp. 97-98.

superstition associating the howling of the dog with impending death."[239] At the beginning of Orpheus the sound of dogs barking in response to a locomotive whistle suggests the loneliness which will be the theme of the play, and Williams uses the sound over and over to identify Val with the fugitive kind. At the same time that the fugitive-fox Val is pursued by the hounds of sex-envy and social conformity, he is said to resemble the hounds. This use of paradoxical symbolism is in accord with the dualism, self-opposition and fatal self-destructiveness which Williams dramatizes throughout the play. Val refers to himself as a dog to convey his hot, sexual nature. His temperature is "always a couple of degrees above normal the same as a dog's, it's normal for me the same as it is for a dog. . ."[240] He describes his and Lady's attempts to get acquainted as a couple of animals sniffing around each other,[241] a reference to dogs which embarrasses Lady. In Battle of Angels all the dog images except one, in which Vee peers at the torn hem of her dress dragging behind her like a big heavy dog trying to catch

[239]Towland, p. 61.

[240]Williams, Orpheus, pp. 35, 71, 107.

[241]Ibid., p. 46.

its tail,[242] relate to Val's sexuality. Myra says that he has eyes that shine in the dark like a dog's,[243] and that he lies like a dog in summer.[244] At the end of the scene in which they first talk and get acquainted, "a dog is heard baying in the distance; the sound has a peculiar, passionate clarity." Myra says the dog is baying at the moon, and, as both Val and Myra say goodnight, "once more the dog is heard baying. They both stop short as though caught by the magic of the sound and face each other again from the stairway and the door. . . ."[245]

Val is referred to in other animal imagery to establish his virility. He stands in the tense frozen attitude of a wild animal listening to something that warns it of danger[246] to show his instinctive behavior. The woman from Waco calls him a dangerous animal she is hunting down.[247] He looks a

[242] Battle, p. 131.

[243] Ibid., p. 144.

[244] Ibid., p. 148.

[245] Ibid., p. 150.

[246] Orpheus, p. 90.

[247] Battle, p. 218.

little faunlike (part man and part goat, again a symbol of his virility),[248] and he describes controlling his hands like holding a herd of elephants straining at a rope.[249] The elephant was known by the ancients as a symbol of self-restraint, power and triumph, according to Rowland (p. 70). Twice he is compared to a cat, jumping with catlike agility onto the counter (p. 95), and being called scaredy cat by Sandra (p. 161).

The Conjure Man is also a symbol of savage, unrestrained animality. He wears a double strand of bleached chicken or hawk bones around his neck (p. 121), carries the breastbone of a bird with the flesh still clinging to it (p. 16), has a turkey neck (p. 102) and clawlike hands (p. 199), and utters a series of sharp barking sounds that rise to a sustained cry of great intensity and wildness when Val first appears and just before the final violent scene. Other characters, as well, have a measure of this fierce, instinctive behavior. Carol is said to be like "a wild animal at bay, desperate but fearless."[250] Her personality combines the moribundity of Jabe, the vitality

[248] Ibid., p. 193.

[249] Ibid., p. 190.

[250] Orpheus, p. 53.

of Myra, the tireless search of Val, and the perverted values of Vee. In addition, because of the powers of her intellect and her association with Cassandra of literature, she represents man's tragic knowledge of his own mortality. She says it is ironic that when she had a collision with a mule, the mule died: "and just to show you the absolute lack of justice, the mule was killed and I was completely uninjured " (p. 129). She is most often associated with the big cat of the jungle. Eva passes her like a timid child skirting a lion cage;[251] and she is said to fight like a tiger.[252] However, Sandra says that Myra would fight like a tiger for Val, and a few lines later Myra does spring at Sandra like a tiger and slaps her fiercely across the face for kissing Val, saying, ". . .When dogs go mad, they ought to be locked and chained."[253]

Myra/Lady is another of Williams's moth-women, although her healthy passion and Italian blood make her more robust than most of the other moths. As Myra was driving to Good Friday church services,

[251]Ibid., p. 12.

[252]Battle, p. 201.

[253]Ibid., p. 216.

> . . .a big white moth flew in the car window. Val, I hate most bugs, but this one I felt a kind of sympathy for. He was terribly young. . . .he had that surprised, inexperienced look about him that young things have. It was easy to see he had just come from the cocoon, and was sooo disappointed. Of cou'se he's expected th' world t' be bright an' gold, but what he found was a nasty, cold spring rain. His two long whiskers were covered with strings of pearls. He sat on the steering wheel an' shook them off. I asked him, "Why?" An' he said, "Don'tcha know? It's in bad taste to put on pearls before dark!"[254]

Like the moth, she has been regenerated by the presence of Val. But she seems to realize that the life which has been renewed in her will end in disappointment. The passage also illustrates her wit and her capacity for tenderness. She is also associated with the monkey that wore a little green velvet suit and came from the old country with Lady's father. As Lady prepares for the opening of the confectionery which she has decorated like her father's wine garden, she remembers the monkey :

> I was not much bigger than the monkey, ha ha! You remember the monkey? The man that sold Papa the monkey said it was a very young monkey, but he was a liar, it was a very old monkey, it was on its last legs, ha ha ha! But it was a well-dressed monkey. . .

[254] Ibid., pp. 194-195.

> It had a green velvet suit and a little red cap that it tipped and a tambourine that it passed around for money, ha ha ha. . . .The grind-organ played and the monkey danced in the sun, ha ha! . . .One day the monkey danced too much in the sun and it was a very old monkey and it dropped dead. My Papa, he turned to the people, he made them a bow and he said, "The show is over, the monkey is dead." Ha ha!. . .For me the show is not over, the monkey is not dead yet![255]

As if her identification with the monkey were not already established--she too has danced in the sun of Val's love and will pay with her death--as she is dying she says, "The show is over. The monkey is dead. . ."[256] The view here is one of the most persistent in Williams's philosophy: that the universe is deterministic and the people in it are merely puppets or monkeys dancing to the tune of the organ grinder until they die.

One last word must be said about the animal images in the Orpheus plays. Although the symbolism is excessive, the language is often fresh and powerful. Some of the most colorful language is put in the mouths of the lesser characters as Williams again demonstrates his ability to manipulate the cliché. Beulah, for example, says that even though the county is dry, "you just walk

[255] Ibid., p. 101.

[256] Ibid., p. 115.

off the highway a couple of feet and whistle three times like a jaybird and a nigger pops out of a bush with a bottle of corn."[257] Dolly tells her to put the melting sherbet in the icebox, but Beulah says that is locking the stable after the horse is gone.[258] Dolly is "Dog" Hamma's wife, but she uses other methods than chain-gang dogs to rid the community of undesirables. She tries to persuade all the tradespeople not to wait on Carol when she goes to the store. Beulah complains about the tradespeople not co-operating: "Dubinsky'd wait on a purple-bottom baboon if it put a dime on th' counter an' pointed at something! . . .You can't ostracize a person out of this county unless everybody cooperates."[259] Carol, evidently, has the reputation of a purple-bottom baboon in the town. One of the sheriff's men comments about Val that he "ain't smiling, his mouth's just twitching like a dead chicken's foot" (p. 95). Vee Talbott speaks of Henry the Eighth who had as many wives as a cat has lives.[260] When she recognizes her vision of Christ

[257] Ibid., p. 7.

[258] Ibid., p. 18; Battle, p. 133.

[259] Orpheus, p. 52.

[260] Battle, p. 177.

as Val, she turns white as goat's milk.[261] The most innocent comment by the characters may have symbolic significance. For example, Eva asks Blanch to remind her to sprinkle a little roach powder on the floor of the confectionery[262] where Myra had kept her dreams; this, of course, symbolizes the corruption of the dream. The ceiling is cobwebbed and flypaper is hanging from it (p. 3) to indicate fragmented, unfulfilled dreams of the past. Eva mentions that someone told her that carps had been seen in Yazoo Pass, indicating that the flood season was about to start;[263] the flood, of course, is the excess of passions which culminates in the destruction of the principal protagonists. Jabe is said to be a gaunt, wolfish man, gray and yellow, and when he comes downstairs, "Wild horses couldn't hold him." He glares into the light like a fierce dying old beast as he comes down to catch Val sleeping in the alcove. "JABE: He's here bright and early. LADY: The early bird catches the worm! JABE: That's right. Where is the worm?"[264]

[261] Ibid., p. 207.

[262] Ibid., p. 125.

[263] Ibid., p. 138.

[264] Orpheus, pp. 83-85.

He implies that Lady herself is the worm. A few moments later Lady says that Val draws the high-school girls like flies in the store.[265] When Lady discovers that Jabe killed her father and that Val is leaving, she is full of clichés--"in a pig's eye," "Bull," "Chickenfeed"[266]--and Williams writes that what they call the moment of truth in the bull ring has happened to Lady, when the matador goes in over the horns of the bull to plant the mortal sword thrust.[267] Like the bull, she is fierce and nobly fighting for her life, but she is doomed before the fight even started. Other death images surround her. Val says she is thrashing around like a hooked catfish.[268] The monkey image and the moth image further suggest death. But Lady does not anticipate her own death. When she asks the nurse about helping sick people let go, she is discussing the death of her husband; ironically, it is he who will kill her in just a few moments. Lady asks the nurse if people shorten suffering "like merciful people shorten an animal's suffering when he's . . . ." The nurse replies, "A human being is not the same as an

[265] Ibid., p. 86.

[266] Ibid., pp. 106-107.

[267] Ibid., p. 106.

[268] Ibid., p. 104.

animal, Mrs. Torrance."[269] Lady, and Williams, are probably not so sure of that statement, for when Val says that people are bought and sold in this world like the carcasses of hogs in butcher shops,[270] Lady agrees. She knows that David sold himself to marry rich and that she sold herself to Jabe out of heartbreak. The characters are like the mule team which is laboring outside on the highway to pull a big truck back on the icy pavement--[271]they struggle and struggle in a lost cause. There is a strong sense of disgust with whatever is human in Orpheus. Whatever is of this earth is prey to corruption. All who seek beauty will perish because

> and it will not be completed,
> no, it will not be completed,
>
> for you must learn, even you, what we have learned,
> that some things are marked by their nature
> to be not completed
> but only longed for and sought for a while and abandoned.[272]

There is much truth, humor, and terror in Orpheus. But again,

[269]Ibid., p. 111.

[270]Ibid., p. 41.

[271]Ibid., p. 44.

[272]Tennessee Williams, "Orpheus Descending," In the Winter of Cities, p. 28.

as in The Rose Tattoo and Camino Real, Williams has relied overmuch on symbols to do the work of character and situation. Almost all the critics have comments upon the excesses of plot and symbol and the resultant simplification. Benjamin Nelson pinpoints the problem:

> The illumination does not arise from the characters and their experience but rather is cast onto the situation as if the playwright were flashing a darkly hued light across his landscape in an attempt to evoke new and more intense patterns and images. There is the increasing rejection of the material from which drama is made: complexity, objectivity and the subtle but imperative intermingling of good and evil. With this increasing simplicity, there is increasing sensationalism as if that single trait becomes dominant through overdevelopment.[273]

Thus, though the play contains some of Williams's best poetic imagery, there is too much reliance on it to illuminate the characters as complex human beings. Overabundant symbolism is the primary problem of Orpheus Descending, turning the play into melodrama.

Melodramatic violence is one of the problems of Sweet Bird of Youth, in which Williams introduces another young Orpheus who represents innocence lost, never to be regained. The play

[273]Nelson, pp. 237-238.

is more successful than Orpheus, however, because the symbolism is more controlled, allowing the complexities of the characters Chance and Alexandra to shine through.

The drama is the unraveling of the theme that youth--the pure sweet bird--is lost with every second that ticks away. The sweet bird will always fly out of reach because it represents an innocence which time itself destroys. Time itself--the fact of life--is the reason for corruption. The enemy is time. This is pounded into the consciousness of the audience at the end of the play, where time is presented in animal images:

> [NOTE: in this area it is very important that Chance's attitude should be self-recognition but not self-pity--a sort of deathbed dignity and honesty apparent in it. In both Chance and the Princess, we should return to the huddling-together of the lost. . . .Because the Princess is equally doomed. She can't turn back the clock any more than can Chance, and the clock is equally relentless to them both. . . .Both are faced with castration, and in her heart she knows it. They sit side by side on the bed like two passengers on a train sharing a bench.] . . .
> PRINCESS: . . . .We're still sitting here together, side by side in this room, like we were occupying the same bench on a train. . . .Look. That little donkey's marching around and around to draw water out of a well. . . .Look, a shepherdboy's leading a flock.--What an old country, timeless.--Look--
> [The sound of a clock ticking is heard, louder and louder.]. . .
> CHANCE: . . . .Time--who could beat it, who could defeat it ever? . . . .I lived on something that--

> time. . . .Gnaws away, like a rat gnaws off its own foot caught in a trap, and then, with its foot gnawed off and the rat set free, couldn't run, couldn't go, bled and died. . . .[274]

The Princess brings to mind ancient and timeless scenes in a dream that they can escape time by staying together. She realizes, of course, being the intelligent character she is, that this is only a game of pretend. But her images are of life. The donkey is drawing the water of life, the fountain of youth, out of the ground. (Williams may have known that Plutarch and Tacitus remarked that the donkey was worshipped by the Jews because it found water springs in the desert during the Exodus.[275]) The shepherdboy with his flock is an image of innocence and purity. Chance's image of the rat, on the other hand, is of death. Beryl Rowland notes that gnawing rats were used in religious art in the Middle Ages to symbolize the way life erodes in themes which illustrated the fleeting nature of time and earthly pleasures.[276] Chance's rat gnaws at himself, which shows that Chance recognizes that the corruption that is

[274]Tennessee Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth (London: Secker and Warburg, 1959), pp. 91-92.

[275]Rowland, p. 21.

[276]Ibid., p. 136.

destroying him comes from within. Castration to him, whose genius has been lovemaking, is death; but he recognizes that he has already castrated himself by the prostitution of his natural powers. He embodies the realization that sex without its vital connection to the rest of life is meaningless. When Alexandra tells him castration waits for him if he stays, he says, "That can't be done to me twice. You did that to me this morning, here on this bed, where I had the honor, where I had the great honor. . . .Whatever happens to me's already happened."[277] He sees that his relationship with Alexandra is shameful and his values are corrupt, and he comes to hate himself for that corruption. Williams may have been indicting society as the culprit, but Chance recognizes that society only carries out his own self-condemnation. He had castrated himself first. The fact that he already had what he was constantly competing to gain, namely Heavenly's love, is as ironic as the rat which gnaws off its own foot. His final destruction is complete when he recognizes that his dream of success was false and his life "means nothing." The sweet bird of youth is gone forever, leaving only the skeletal remains of decay.

[277]Williams, Sweet Bird, pp. 90-91.

Robert Brustein has connected the images in Sweet Bird of Youth with the image in Orpheus Descending in an analysis that points out the ambivalence in Williams's symbols.

> . . .the sweet bird of youth is that same fowl mentioned in Orpheus Descending: an image of childhood innocence and grace before the fall which, by staying alive in the sky, remains free from the corruptions of the earth. Since Chance, in his present fall from grace, has committed a grave offense against the bird, the removal of his sexual organs can be regarded as a form of poetic justice. Chance is guilty as charged and his punishment is deserved.
>
> Unfortunately, this interpretation cannot be squared with the pagan implications of the play. The bird not only represents purity but--through a pun common in most Latin languages and even in children's English--the male sex organ. If the bird is a phallic image, then Chance's sweetness and youth are associated with sexuality, not innocence, and his purity is terminated only when he is castrated, not when he turns to more perverse pleasures. Thus, it is Boss Finley who has offended against the bird; Chance has only advanced its pagan doctrine. In a non-Christian interpretation, Chance's fate is undeserved and reflects not Chance's guilt but the anti-sexual sadism of the man who perpetrated the violence.[278]

Williams intended both interpretations, as he has chosen other images to convey the duality of his own perception of the universe. When the bird image appears in the play itself, it is

[278]Robert Brustein, "Williams' Nebulous Nightmare," Hudson Review, XII (Summer 1959), 257.

often as mere shadows of birds sweeping the blinds, suggesting the illusory nature of innocence and purity, the shadows of past memory, the idealistic dreams of Chance. At the news that Chance's mother has died, for example, the shadows of birds sweep the blind to suggest the loss caused by time.[279] When the play opens the soft, urgent cries of the birds, the sound of their wings, is heard outside the windows.[280] Since the sound is ever-present, soft, yet urgent, it is probably a representation of time, which Chance calls "quieter than your heart-beat, but. . .slow dynamite"[281] in the last scene. The sound of these gulls provides Alexandra a witty remark: "Those pigeons out there sound hoarse. They sound like gulls to me. Of course, they could be pigeons with laryngitis."[282] She is trying to determine where she is, but when she remembers the past she wishes she had not. The bird image appears also in a speech by Boss Finley about deceiving his wife. When she was dying, Boss gave her a $15,000 diamond clip to make her believe

[279]Williams, Sweet Bird, p. 17.

[280]Ibid., p. 15.

[281]Ibid., p. 92.

[282]Ibid., p. 26.

she would live. "And she sat up as bright as a little bird in that bed with the diamond clip on. . . .It would have been worth that money to see that one little smile your mama bird give me at noon of the day she was dying."[283] The bird here represents delusion, and also shows Boss's mendacity, because his intention from the beginning was to return the clip to the jeweler after she died.

Princess Alexandra, one of the best characters Williams has created, is another of Williams's women who is both fierce tiger and vulnerable moth. She is so weak and ill in the first act that she requires an oxygen mask to help her breathe. Chance tells her that she looks exotic in the mask, like a princess from Mars or a big magnified insect.[284] The image serves as a symbol of her disorientation, her dissolving shattered restlessness, which Cirlot says insects frequently symbolize.[285] She continues the idea of a dead planet when she introduces the tiger image. She says she was retired to that dead planet the moon,

[283]Ibid., pp. 54-55.

[284]Ibid., p. 22.

[285]Cirlot, p. 26.

> There's nowhere else to retire to when you retire from an art because, believe it or not, I really was once an artist. So I retired to the moon, but the atmosphere of the moon doesn't have any oxygen in it. I began to feel breathless, in that withered, withering country, of time coming after time not meant to come after, and so I discovered. . . .Discovered this! And other practices like it, to put to sleep the tiger that raged in my nerves. . . .Why the unsatisfied tiger? In the nerves jungle? Why is anything, anywhere, unsatisfied, and raging? . . .I just wasn't young any more. . . .But you see, I couldn't get old with that tiger still in me raging.[286]

The image suggests the power that is still in her and that she will display with magnificence in the last act. It also suggests her lust, unsatisfied and raging, which she tries to sate with sex and hashish. She is a fighter, seeking life shamelessly, on any terms whatsoever.[287] Twice she is referred to as a racehorse to contrast her present state with her past glory. Chance says she is breathing like a quarter horse that has been run a full mile[288] as she hurries to forgetfulness via pills and liquor. She discovers that Chance is using her as "a dead racehorse is used to make glue,"[289] but her spirit is

[286]Williams, Sweet Bird, pp. 28-29.

[287]Ibid., p. 35.

[288]Ibid., p. 22.

[289]Ibid., p. 40.

too great to allow her to die and she soon has Chance on her own terms. He tries to blackmail her into signing blank checks, but she tells him to put the checkbook away:

> When monster meets monster, one monster has to give way, AND IT WILL NEVER BE ME. . . .Now then, you put the cart a little in front of the horse. Signed checks are payment, delivery comes first. . . .Now, Chance, please pay close attention while I tell you the very special conditions under which I will keep you in my employment. . . .[290]

Chance had earlier said, "I like you, you're a nice monster,"[291] and it is true that he treats her with unmistakable sympathy. He recognizes the fear in her. When she tells about running out of the premiere of her disastrous movie, he suggests what later turns out to be true: "Maybe it wasn't a failure, maybe you were just scared, just chicken, Princess. . . ."[292] Her fear is presented as a rabbit when she is trying to remember who she is. Chance pulls her into his arms, and she rests in them, panting a little like a trapped rabbit.[293] Like a rabbit,

[290] Ibid., p. 35.

[291] Ibid., p. 23.

[292] Ibid., p. 29.

[293] Ibid., p. 25.

she has tried to escape the truth about her lost youth and beauty which is pursuing her; through the use of sex and drugs she has burrowed underground in fright. (The timidity and swiftness of the rabbit is applied to Aunt Nonnie as well when she comes running up the drive "like a dog-track rabbit."[294])

Images of dogs appear several times in the play. Miss Lucy, Boss Finley's mistress, has a "sharp terrier face," her head cocks "like a puzzled terrier's," and she says, "Well, I'll be a dawg's mother."[295] The image suggests fornication and the fact that she is being kept like a pet dog. The dog image is used in the same way when Alexandra remembers other young men like Chance who started out with charm and sweetness but are now led by rich old women by an invisible chain through Grand Hotel lobbies and casinos and bars like blind, dying lap dogs.[296] She offers to take Chance with her as such a lap dog, but he prefers literal castration to that sort of emotional castration: "Don't you know, I'd die first? I would rather die first. . . ."[297] Ironically, the pure love between Chance

[294]Ibid., p. 48.

[295]Ibid., pp. 57, 71, 60.

[296]Ibid., pp. 85-86.

[297]Ibid., p. 86.

and Heavenly has led to the emotional and sexual death of both. She has had her sexual organs removed, too, "spayed like a dawg by Dr. Goerge Scudder's knife."[298] Chance "put such rot in her body she had to be gutted and hung on a butcher's hook, like a chicken dressed for Sunday. . . ."[299] The same image of corruption is used when Tom Junior calls Chance chicken-gut, with the added cliché meaning of coward (p. 75). Chance refuses to believe that Heavenly will corrupt her purity by appearing on the platform to campaign with her father. If he believed it, he says, he would dive off the pier and swim straight out to Diamond Key and past it, "and keep on swimming till sharks and barracuda took me for live bait, brother."[300] At the moment he says this he is surrounded by a group of barracuda-like people who are looking at him with hostility, suspicion, and a cruel sense of sport. The bar where they sit is described as a bull ring, and they deliberately bait Chance into the role of braggart and fool. He becomes the hunted animal, and in an image that was applied to Val Xavier, he freezes

[298] Ibid., p. 77.

[299] Ibid., p. 90.

[300] Ibid., p. 69.

momentarily at the sound of a voice calling him, "like a stag scenting hunters."[301] As a symbol, the stag has several different meanings which can apply to Chance. According to ancient belief, the stag could renew its youth because it annually renewed its horns;[302] it is therefore, an ironic symbol for Chance, who cannot renew his lost youth. Another fable, stemming from Aristotle and other natural historians, maintained that the stag was so entranced by the music of the pipes that it remained transfixed and could easily be captured by hunters. This stag, said Horapollo, symbolized a man deceived by flattery.[303] Similarly, Chance was crowned with laurel, lavished with praise, too early in his life, and the gaudy illusions of success lead to his destruction. A ritual act centering around the stag cited by Rowland is repeated in the castration of Chance at the end of Sweet Bird of Youth. The alleged licentiousness of the stag accounts for its use in a ritual act in which members of a community, in order to show their disapproval of sexual license, selected one of themselves to play the part

[301] Ibid., p. 74.

[302] Rowland, p. 100.

[303] Ibid.

of the hunted stag while the rest set off in hunting garb to track him down. They would "kill" the quarry near the house of the offending person; or, in India, the offender would be the stag, and when he was caught he was mutilated.[304] Boss Finley and Tom Junior are also pictured as two stags fighting over which will take control. Boss says that everyone in his family, including Tom Junior, is dragging him down; that Tom Junior got caught for a stag party and that "everyone knows you had to be drove through school like a blazeface mule pullin' a plough uphill: flunked out of college with grades that only a moron would have an excuse for." When Tom Junior replies that Boss has his well-known promiscuity, Miss Lucy, who wrote that Boss was too old to cut the mustard, there is a pause, and "The two stags, the old and the young one, face each other, panting. . . .Boss Finley turns away, wounded, baffled: stares out at the audience with his old, bloodshot eyes. . . ."[305] Boss's increasing impotence is sufficient motivation for what Chance calls sex envy.

[304] Ibid., p. 101.

[305] Williams, Sweet Bird, pp. 50-51.

Two names in Sweet Bird are of animals. The hotel waiter is named Fly, and Chance tells him to "Shoo, Fly."[306] This may serve to foreshadow the corruption that the play reeks of. In an echo of Blanche's starfish pin and Mrs. Venable's seahorse brooch, Boss Finley's boat is named Starfish (p. 46). Since the starfish has five appendages, it may represent man, who also has five. But it is the fragile, and beautiful side of man which is easily destroyed.

Though the imagery is well controlled in Sweet Bird of Youth, personal philosophical statements and "morality play" plot are not. The play approaches Orpheus Descending in melodrama; its control of symbolism makes it a distinct improvement, however.

T. Lawrence Shannon of The Night of the Iguana would like to masochistically indulge himself in the martyrdom that Chance Wayne and Val Xavier do, but Hannah--and Williams--recognizes the self-indulgence in such behavior and will not allow the play to become melodrama. When he is tied to the hammock to prevent him from committing suicide (his threat to take the long swim to China may be mere histrionics, his idea of a painless

[306] Ibid., p. 16.

atonement, but Hannah is afraid he might be intercepted by sharks and barracuda before he gets to the barrier reef[307]), he is described in terms of an animal and his identification with the captive iguana is obvious. He says that he is "trussed up like a hog being hauled off to the slaughterhouse,"[308] and with an animal outcry he pulls at the chain suspending the gold cross around his neck, cutting himself.[309] The Germans gather about his captive figure as if they were looking at a funny animal in a zoo (p. 78), and Hannah later says that they are "tormenting him like an animal in a trap."[310] The trapped animal is more specifically the iguana, which sums up the contrast between the kindness and cruelty, freedom and possession of the various characters in the play. Shannon spells out the symbolism of the iguana:

> It's an iguana. I'll show you. . . .See? The iguana? At the end of its rope? Trying to go on past the end of its goddam rope? Like <u>you</u>! Like <u>Me</u>! Like Grampa with his last poem! . . . .It's a kind of lizard--a big one, a giant one. They tie them up and fatten

[307]Tennessee Williams, <u>The Night of the Iguana</u> (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), p. 82.

[308]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 80.

[309]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 77.

[310]Ibid., p. 79.

> them up and then eat them up, when they're ready for eating. They're a delicacy. Taste like white meat of chicken. . . .And also the kids, the Mexican kids, have a lot of fun with them, poking out their eyes with sticks and burning their tails with matches. You know? Fun? Like that? . . . Iguanas have been known to bite their tails off when they're tied up by their tails. . . .[311]

The image of the iguana eating its own tail is an echo of Chance Wayne's image of the rat gnawing its leg to free itself. Like the characters in the play, the iguana is trapped by a cruel, deterministic universe. The fate of Hannah, Shannon, and Nonno is determined by their past, the rope which they are trying to go on past. Hannah has been trapped by her Puritanism and her inability to stand physical touching. When Shannon says he thought she was "an emancipated Puritan," she replies, "Who is. . .ever. . .completely?"[312] Shannon's self-destructive behavior has been determined, according to a psychological analysis by Maxine, by his infantile rage against Mama and God for the guilt he felt after being punished for masturbation. Nonno is trapped by incompletion, his inability to finish the poem and, thus, finish his life. Hannah says that

[311] Ibid., pp. 99-101.

[312] Ibid., p. 80.

this iguana is tied by its neck and cannot free itself. She wants to free it because, like herself and Shannon and every other human being, it is able to feel pain and panic. Shannon tells her that the iguana disturbs her mostly because of its parallel situation to her grandfather's dying effort to finish his last poem, but he "plays God" and frees the iguana in "a little act of grace."[313] The act is his own salvation as well, for he has shown the courage to break out of his deterministic behavior patterns and turn from the cruelty he showed at the beginning of the play to the kindness he displays towards the animal, Hannah, and finally Maxine. He breaks out of the isolated cubicle of his fear and loneliness to exchange a little understanding with Hannah: by showing pity and compassion, he is able to exorcise the spook of his loneliness. At the same time that Shannon frees himself and the reptile, Nonno finishes his poem, freeing himself to die and freeing Hannah from her role as caretaker. Nonno's poem presents the world as a place in which man, like the orange branch, reaches gloriously for heaven but plummets back to the obscene, corrupting earth. Such a world is frightening and lonely and requires courage to live in it. Hannah embodies this courage; she says that just

[313] _Ibid_. pp. 102, 104.

by enduring and making the spooks respect endurance one can win the battle against the spook of fear and loneliness.[314] Her acceptance of everything within human beings, unless it is unkind or violent, mirrors what she has found to believe in: "Broken gates between people so they can reach each other, even if it's just for one night only."[315] So that, as impossible as physical relationships are for her, she can still reach out from her loneliness and help people, even if only momentarily. This she does with Shannon during their night together; with the pathetic, lonely salesman whom she kindly allowed his satisfaction; and with her grandfather, whom she encourages to finish the poem. So, finally, she prompts Shannon to release the suffering iguana. She is perhaps the strongest and most admirable of Williams's characters, in spite of her psychic incapacity to physically relate to another person. She emerges, in the words of Walter Kerr, "at once in command of herself and the imprisoned victim of herself, and in the haunting unresolved duality she is beautiful."[316]

[314] Ibid., p. 87.

[315] Ibid., p. 86.

[316] Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune (December 29, 1961), p. 8.

The iguana also serves, as was noted in the discussion of the short story, as a phallic symbol. A limerick quoted by Shannon is more than plain:

> There was a young gaucho named Bruno
> Who said about love, This I do know:
> Women are fine, and sheep are divine,
> But iguanas are--Numero Uno![317]

On "Numero Uno" Shannon empties Maxine's drink deliberately on to the humped, wriggling posterior of Pedro. When the Mexican boys first appear with the wildly agitated iguana captured in a shirt, Frau Fahrenkopf rushes over to Maxine to ask if they have caught a snake. When Maxine says it is a lizard that they will eat, the Frau strikes a grotesque attitude of terror as if she were threatened by Jack the Ripper and says with exaggerated revulsion, "Ouuu. . .lizard!"[318] The Germans, in the way they torment Shannon when he is tied and in their callous acceptance of cruelty to the iguana, serve as a commentary on violence and death to innocent victims. They raucously celebrate the bombing of London with euphoric horseplay as they listen to the Führer on the radio, "a human voice like a mad dog's bark."[319] The two

[317] Ibid., p. 51.

[318] Ibid., p. 50.

[319] Ibid., p. 40.

younger Nazis are on their honeymoon, and Hilda, the bride, walks astride a big inflated rubber horse which has an ecstatic smile and great winking eyes. She periodically capers across the stage shouting "Horsey, horsey, giddap!" as she waddles astride it.[320] The inflatable horse makes her a centaur, which has always symbolized lust. This is Williams's most blatantly sexual use of the hobbyhorse which has appeared in several works, one of which included a German sex-goddess, Olga ("The Mattress by the Tomato Patch"), very similar to Hilda.

The other peripheral figures in the play are the busload of Texas schoolteachers, whom Shannon calls old wet hens (pp. 11, 12). Their leader, Miss Fellowes, an appropriately symbolic name for the mannish vocal teacher, "comes chargin' up the hill like a bull elephant on a rampage" (p. 15), mercilessly taunts Shannon, and accomplishes his dismissal as tour guide. She leads the schoolteachers in community sings on the bus: songs such as "Pop Goes the Weasel," which, according to Rowland, probably has an erotic origin.[321] Also pursuing Shannon is a seventeen-year-old girl whom Shannon calls Miss

[320] Ibid., pp. 12, 38, 85. Beryl Rowland notes that in German the honeymoon can be termed stutenwocke or mare week (p. 105).

[321] Rowland, p. 160.

Bird-Girl for her singing. Every night on the trip this "young chick," this "canary," "this Texas song-bird," had given a vocal recital in which she addressed her "I Love You Truly" straight at Shannon.[322] She is "travelling under the wing" of Miss Fellowes, whose commands she obeys "like a well-trained dog."[323] All of society, then, is presented as hostile to fragmented characters such as Shannon or Hannah. Shannon says that the plaza, a symbol of civilization as opposed to the isolation of Maxine's Costa Verde Hotel, is "hot, noisy, stinking, swarming with flies. Pariah dogs dying in the--"[324] He mentions pariah dogs again (p. 98), an echo of the plaza in Camino Real. He himself is a pariah, having been locked out of his church for fornication and heresy (having been fired from countless jobs as a tour guide), and instead of being properly contrite, he denounces his congregation in an image from "The Maledicition": ". . . .And out they slithered, they slithered, they slithered out of their pews to their shiny black cockroach sedans. . ."[325] The flies and cockroaches symbolize

[322]Williams, Iguana, pp. 12-13.

[323]Ibid., pp. 12, 22.

[324]Ibid., p. 15.

[325]Ibid., p. 47.

the corruption in society and in the world.

Like the threatening world of Sebastian Venable, which reverberated with bird calls from a jungle-garden, Shannon's world echoes with harsh bird cries.[326] These sounds usually occur when he is particularly threatened, such as when the young girl Charlotte shouts for him, after he has had a liquor-cart fight with Maxine, or when he is throwing a coconut at the spook. His view is that the universe--and God--is composed of many destructive forces and is indifferent to suffering. When the storm blows up, Shannon sees his God--"Yes, I see him, I hear him, I know Him. And if He doesn't know that I know Him, let Him strike me dead with a bolt of His lightning,"[327] and stretches his hands out through the rain as if he were reaching for something outside and beyond himself. In an image from the short story, the storm is compared to a giant white bird attacking the hilltop of the Costa Verde. The bird is symbolic of creative deity and, in Scandinavian mythology, of storms.[328] Earlier, Shannon had stated his conception of this God: "I want to go back to the Church and preach the

[326] Ibid., pp. 17, 25, 39, 59, 88.

[327] Ibid., p. 65.

[328] Cirlot, p. 26.

gospel of God as Lightning and Thunder. . .and also stray dogs vivisected and. . .and. . .and. . . ."[329] The universe is violent as it rips apart stray dogs such as Shannon. But Shannon loves to wallow in self-pity. The universe has actually been much kinder to him than to Hannah. She has endured it, and, because of her endurance, has overcome it. She has been unable to find a permanent place, a home, in such a harsh world except in the heart of her grandfather, and even that is not permanent, for he will be dead soon. Shannon points out the lack of permanence in her life:

> HANNAH: I think of a home as being a thing that two people have between them in which each can. . . .well, nest--rest--live in, emotionally speaking. . . .
> SHANNON: When a bird builds a nest to rest in and live in, it doesn't build it in a . . .a falling-down tree.
> HANNAH: I'm not a bird. . . .
> SHANNON: When a bird builds a nest, it builds it with an eye for the. . .the relative permanence of the location, and also for the purpose of mating and propagating its species.
> HANNAH: I still say that I'm not a bird, Mr. Shannon, I'm a human being and when a member of that fantastic species builds a nest in the heart of another, the question of permanence isn't the first or even the last thing that's considered. . . .[330]

[329]Williams, Iguana, p. 48.

[330]Ibid., pp. 90-91.

Her strength is in recognizing the risk involved in any relationship and having the courage to accept the risk. Yet, ironically, given the weakness of her bodily inhibitions, her relationships are always fragmented and must be impermanent "one-night stands." Perhaps what she considers when she builds a nest is intensity or need. She recognizes that it is a relative world, but she maintains absolute values of courage, kindness, and acceptance of others. She can partially, but not completely, win out over her own personality through these values, and thus banish the power of determinism. There is always hope for renewal of life, the meaning of the heron which is carved on the jade piece which Hannah offers to Maxine for security.[331]

Nonno is ever hopeful, but he lacks the guilt and sense of responsibility for his own actions which Hannah has. He is utterly happy, utterly guileless. He says he will soon be out of his wheelchair "leaping around here like an--old--mountain--goat."[332] The keen sight of the mountain goat suggests that Nonno is a visionary, merely awaiting his vision. He is aware

[331]Cirlot, p. 141.

[332]Williams, Iguana, p. 28.

that his disgraceful longevity is unwelcome: "I know some hotels don't want to take dogs, cats or monkeys and some don't even solicit the patronage of infants in their late nineties . . . ."[333] He has the madness and fragility of the very old, and is thus one of Williams's moths. When a light fixture is turned on, "the great pearly globe is decorated by night insects, large but gossamer moths that have immolated themselves on its surface: the light through their wings gives them an opalescent color, a touch of fantasy. . . .The old man is impeccably dressed in snow-white linen with a black string tie. His leonine mane of hair gleams like silver as he passes under the globe."[334] Like most of the playwright's other moth characters, he is also compared to a big cat--the author's ambivalence cannot be escaped. The lion's close relationship to the sun and its symbolism as time devouring a man is evident here.

There are several other insect images besides that of the moth. Miss Fellowes accuses Shannon of giving fleas to Charlotte; she came back from his hotel room flea bitten (p. 74). The fleas

[333] Ibid.

[334] Ibid., p. 52.

suggest her deshabille and her sexual corruption. The ever-present mosquitoes, which are particularly vicious after the tropical downpour when the wind is exhausted, represent all the annoyance in Shannon's cruel universe. Maxine is one of these annoyances. When she touches Shannon's sweating forehead, he brushes her hand off like an insect (p. 51). In her aggressive efforts to trap Shannon, she is like a spider; Shannon says he did not know that she had turned into a widow, a sort of "bright widow spider" (p. 58). The fact that he calls her a "bright widow spider" instead of a "black widow spider" indicates that his acquiescence to her desires at the end of the play is not so painful.

The relationship between Shannon and Maxine is interesting. He enjoys insulting her and she never notices the insults. He tells her she looks terrible in pants and that the reason her husband Fred quit talking to her and they just exchanged grunts is that maybe he thought Maxine had turned into a pig (p. 67). He cuts in on her talk about his emotional condition with the honking sound of a panicky goose (p. 84), and she just walks off. Her marriage to Fred has been lonely. They respect each other, but he fished all night while she turned to the Mexican boys and moonlight swims for her satisfaction. Maxine knows

"the difference between loving someone and just sleeping with someone," though, so she is not completely satisfied with the boys, who she says are graceful like cats and just as dependable too. She is first described in an image which Williams used again for the Gnadiges Fraulein: "Maxine always laughs with a single harsh, loud bark, opening her mouth like a seal expecting a fish to be thrown to it."[335] This is more than just a description of her laugh. It describes her relationship to her husband, who fished all night and all day, but just threw what he caught back in the sea; it shows that she expected much more than she got from him. Evidently, he never threw a fish to her, he never gave her anything of his emotions. This kind of behavior was more insulting to her than the insults Shannon hurls at her; she finds Shannon's insults satisfying. "Dear old Fred was always a mystery to me. He was so patient and tolerant with me that it was insulting to me. A man and a woman have got to challenge each other. . . ."[336] She has settled for something which works for her, and she will settle for Shannon, even if it is not on the highest level. Her adjustment to life shows that she possesses the courage, though not the sensitivity, of

[335] Ibid., p. 7.

[336] Ibid., p. 19.

Hannah. Maxine, like Hannah, is not a weak person (p. 60).

The Night of the Iguana is Williams's most hopeful play. The major characters are able to face the universe, evil as Williams's universe is, with some measure of sanity and dignity. The theme is developed and integrated by effective use of imagery, and the central image, that of the iguana, is one of the playwright's most original.

VII. IMAGERY AND WILLIAMS'S REALITY

In The Knightly Quest Williams makes a major statement about the artist and his view of reality. The artist is able to transform an object into an image of that object to create a statement of truth:

> But in his vision was that alchemy of the romantic, that capacity for transmutation somewhere between a thing and the witness of it. The gods used to do that for us. Ceaselessly lamenting women were changed into arboreal shapes and fountains. Masterless hounds became a group of stars. The earth and the sky were full of metamorphosed being. Behind all of this there must have been some truth. Perhaps it was actually the only truth. Things may be only what we change them into, now that we have taken over this former prerogative of the divine.[1]

He suggests that each of his plays represents a glimpse of reality, a momentary image drawn from that which is fleeting, transitory, and fragmentary. Esther Merle Jackson says,

> His dramatic form. . .represents the struggle of man to transcend his humanity, to provide for himself a mode of reconciliation with divine purpose. Williams's form is also of expressionistic lineage. Like the objective expressionists. . .the playwright is concerned with the objectification of subjective vision,

[1]Williams, The Knightly Quest, p. 84.

> with its transformation into concrete symbols. . . . Like the objective expressionists, the playwright regards art as one of the great life forms, as an instrument of reconciliation no less important than religion, philosophy, politics, or human love. The search for a concrete expressive form--a shape congruent with poetic vision--is a motif that appears throughout the work of Williams. . . .It is clear. . .that Williams hopes to extract from art a truth greater than that ordinarily apprehensible in life. . . . Through the playwright's intermediaries, the "fevered visions" of life pass before the spectator and metamorphose into images embodying a greater meaning than does the experience which they are intended to interpret.[2]

In his concept of form Williams is a romantic. Like the romantics, he ascribes to art the ability to discern between light and dark, body and soul; like the romantics, he ascribes to the artist the ability to reveal truth. This function of art is discussed by Henri Bergson in his essay Laughter:

> What is the object of art? Could reality come into direct contact with sense and consciousness, could we enter into immediate communion with things and with ourselves, probably art would be useless, or rather we should all be artists. . . . So art, whether it be painting or sculpture, poetry or music, has no other object than to bring us face to face with reality itself. . . .
>
> Hence it follows that art always aims at what is individual. . . .What the dramatist unfolds before us is the life-history of a soul, a living tissue of feelings and events--some-

[2]Jackson, pp. 27-28, 30, 33.

> thing in short, which has once happened and can never be repeated. We may, indeed, give general names to these feelings, but they cannot be the same thing in another soul. They are individualized. Thereby, and thereby only, do they belong to art.[3]

Williams conceives drama, says Jackson, in such individualized terms. His plays are in the form of a vision or a series of images proceeding from the consciousness of the protagonist. The images are composed as a quilt, pieced together from fragments in an orderly progression to give a sensible form to his dramas. And it is the form, the pattern which the artist imposes on the world, which is reality to Williams: "perhaps it is actually the only truth." Jackson notes that many contemporaries, including the existentialists, have suggested that the drama is the pillar of ultimate reality, the device for discovering permanent truths.[4] Williams employs this line of reasoning throughout his work. In The Glass Menagerie Tom reverses the normal order of reality by suggesting that the play is the real truth: "But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I

[3]Henri Bergson, Laughter in Comedy ed. by Wylie Sypher (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1956), pp. 157-158,162,164-65.

[4]Jackson, p. 55.

give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion."[5] The statement of his poetic method of expressionism in the production notes to The Glass Menagerie reflects his awareness of the importance of imagery in revealing truth:

> Expressionism and all other unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth. When a play employs unconventional techniques, it is not, or certainly shouldn't be, trying to escape its responsibility of dealing with reality, or interpreting experience, but it is actually or should be attempting to find a closer approach, a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are. . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . .truth, life, or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation, through changing into other forms than those which were merely present in appearance.[6]

Gerald Weales has noted that by making so many symbols and by overexplaining some of the main ones Williams has used them to insist on the expressionistic quality of his plays.[7] The dramatist has attempted to create his own reality; that is, to make images more coherent and more meaningful than the life which they represent. As Herbert Read writes:

[5]Williams, Menagerie, p. 747.

[6]Ibid., p. 695.

[7]Gerald Weales, Tennessee Williams (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), p. 40.

> [T]hat which we call reality is a chain of images invented by man, whose personal existence must be affirmed before he proceeds with his invention. Reality is man-made, and the maker is the image-maker, the poet. Reality accords with the images the artist makes, and derives its validity from such values as integrity, self-consistency, viability, pragmatic satisfaction, aesthetic satisfaction, etc.[8]

The playwright believes art is a "creative synthesis of life,"[9] so therefore he has created his perception of reality from the fragments of past perspectives. Marya Mannes, for example, considers Williams "an artist of great talent and painful sensibility who illuminates fragments but never the whole. He illuminates, if you will, that present sickness, which <u>is</u> fragmentation. . . ."[10] Like the cubist painters, he perceives the truth from various perspectives and fits together these fragmented images to create his statement of truth. As Jackson has written,

> the images created by Williams are not conceived as copies of any known reality. . . .For Williams,

[8]Herbert Read, <u>The Philosophy of Modern Art</u> (New York: Horizon Press, 1953), pp. 95-96.

[9]Tischler, p. 296.

[10]Marya Mannes, "The Morbid Magic of Tennessee Williams," <u>The Reporter</u>, XII (May 19, 1955), 41-42.

> reality itself lies shattered. In the fragmentary world of his theatre, new images are pieced together from partialities: they are composed from splinters of broken truths. . . .the images which appear in the theatre of Williams are not records of events; nor are they symbols drawn intact from the stream of consciousness. For the playwright has subjected his lyric moment to process. In his theatre, the instant of vision has been recreated: its image has been enlarged and enhanced.[11]

The image is the key element in Williams's synthetic technique. And the animal images, because of their frequency and their importance in illuminating the major themes of Williams, are a chief means of explaining the author's work. Like the light and flexible, but strong, "arrowy skeletons of birds," Williams's animal images are a form, a backbone on which he hangs the muscle of character and action in his plays. Through his artist's vision, he transforms objects, persons, and even words into greater ideas than they possess alone. His animal images

[11]Jackson, pp. 36-37. For a further discussion of this idea see Herbert Read, The Philosophy of Modern Art, pp. 53-54. Read states: "The projection of a symbol or image from the unconscious is not an act of creation in that sense: it is merely the transfer of an existing object from one sphere to another--from the mental sphere, for example, to the verbal or plastic sphere. The essential function of art is revealed in a coordination of images (whether unconscious or perceptual does not matter) into an effective pattern. The art is in the pattern, which is a personal intuition of the artist, and not in the imagery."

convey the major themes which he constantly reiterates: loneliness, incompletion, illusion, escape, time, sex, and death. His use of animal images to symbolize these themes indicates that such images are essential to his work. The frequency of the animal images--they comprise most of his images--and their importance in defining Williams's ambiguous view of the universe indicate that the animal image is one of his most important tools in creating the poetry of his work. He uses the animal image to define character, to create mood, to represent layer upon layer of ideas which are crucial to his work. The reality of his universe can best be defined by use of the image, and particularly of the animal image, the tool with which he takes drama beyond realism into an organic symbolism which permeates the entirety of his work.

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