

THE THEME OF ESCAPISM IN REPRESENTATIVE
FULL-LENGTH PLAYS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by
Carol Ann Ware
May, 1973

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FOREWORD

I would like to express my appreciation to the members of my committee for all of the assistance they have given me during my work on this thesis. Mr. Cecil Pickett, Dr. John Q. Anderson, and Dr. William Lee Pryor have provided the direction, encouragement, and criticism which have enabled me to finish this project. The idea for the thesis came from a course on Tennessee Williams taught by Dr. Pryor. As a result of his comments and suggestions concerning content and organization, I developed the topic first into a term paper and then into this thesis.

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In his literary works Tennessee Williams exhibits a concern with escapism which complements his personal episodes of escapist behavior. Williams characterizes his motivation for becoming a writer as a desire to hide from the unpleasant realities of his adolescence. He admits that he uses liquor and drugs to blot out an awareness of problems in the real world. Like many of his dramatic characters, Williams often runs away from troublesome circumstances by taking trips to distant places.

Williams seems to present three distinct approaches to escapism in his full-length dramas. In The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire he depicts escapists who are destroyed by their inability to live in reality. Their futile attempts to avoid actuality often only create new problems. In Camino Real, Williams' fantasy play, a few escapists are able to flee from a harsh environment because the limitations of a realistic setting do not apply to their situation. In the non-fantasy world Williams creates in Sweet Bird of Youth and The Night of the Iguana, successful escapes are no more possible than they were for the Wingfields or Blanche DuBois. In each of these last two plays, however, one escapist manages ultimately to accept reality and endure life without relying upon escapism.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Tennessee Williams is a literary artist who not only writes in various genres but also deals with many different themes, symbols, and character types. One theme which is particularly evident in his work in drama and fiction is that of escapism. According to George Kernodle, this theme is actually the one found most frequently in modern drama.¹ Signi Falk recognizes that Williams has a definite talent for presenting interesting studies of human nature and describing frustrated characters who resort to various types of escapism.² Time and again Williams creates characters who try to avoid life in the world around them. Some of these people attempt to escape the consequences of actions they have committed in the past. Others are unable to accept the unpleasant truths which accompany the reality of their present-day lives. Still others desire to evade responsibilities which they foresee as part of their lives in the future. Williams provides his characters with several different types of escape mechanisms. For instance, those who feel threatened while in a particular place often simply leave that city and journey elsewhere.

¹ George R. Kernodle, "Patterns of Belief in Contemporary Drama," in Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature, ed. Stanley Romaine Hopper (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 188.

² Signi Falk, "The Profitable World of Tennessee Williams," Modern Drama, 1 (1958), 179.

Characters who want to blot out all awareness of reality for a certain length of time either dull their senses through the consumption of liquor and drugs or engage in sexual activity. Frequently Williams describes people who are so dissatisfied with the real world that they create fantasy worlds of their own to live in. Sometimes these characters are such skillful creators that they go insane and thus escape from reality completely. Only a few of all Williams' characters, however, are able to abandon their escapist activities and become re-adjusted to reality.

Examples of Williams' concern with the theme of escapism can be found in many works written during his literary career. Durant DaPonte feels that Williams' most sympathetic characters are those unfortunates who are chronically unable either to come to terms with their environment or to face reality.³ In Williams' novel The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone, Meg Bishop charges Karen Stone with escapism for retiring from the stage, fleeing to Rome, and soliciting the company of a succession of young gigolos. Lucio in the short story "The Malediction" writes lies to his brother about good jobs he has held and promotions he has earned while he has actually been struggling to survive as a poverty-stricken worker on an assembly line. In the story "The Angel in the Alcove," a young artist desperately tries to escape admitting to himself that he is dying of tuberculosis by finding other things to complain about to his landlady. Moony in the one-act play "Moony's Kid

³ Durant DaPonte, "Tennessee's Tennessee Williams," Tennessee Studies in Literature, 1 (1956), 12.

"Don't Cry" is a frustrated factory worker who wants to escape the depressing life of the big city and return to the freedom of the North Woods where he was a lumberjack. Another one-act play, "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion," presents two derelict rooming house boarders who depend on lies and delusions to make their wretched existences bearable.

Williams' longer dramas contain even more characters who act as escapists. The most memorable of these characters, according to Francis Donahue, are emotionally displaced people trying to escape from a world they are unable to cope with.⁴ Vee Talbott in Williams' early play Battle of Angels finds refuge from the harshness of the outside world in religion and primitive art and eventually goes insane. In a later version of this work entitled Orpheus Descending, Carol Cutrere is a decadent aristocrat who engages in lovemaking, even though it is painful for her, in order to escape loneliness. Two other plays which have several points in common are Summer and Smoke and The Eccentricities of a Nightingale. The first of these creations, Summer and Smoke, describes the way in which John Buchanan, Jr., dissipates his energies through drinking, gambling, and sexual activity in an attempt to avoid the responsibilities attached to becoming a doctor. In The Eccentricities of a Nightingale Mrs. Winemiller becomes mentally unbalanced as a result of refusing for fifteen years to accept the reality of her sister's death in a museum fire. Serafina

⁴ Francis Donahue, The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1964), p. 220.

delle Rose in The Rose Tattoo pays honor to the memory of her dead husband and tries not to believe the truth about his unfaithfulness. Brick Pollitt in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof drinks in order to escape both his fear that his relationship with his friend Skipper was unnatural and his guilt for perhaps having contributed to Skipper's death. In Suddenly Last Summer Mrs. Venable suffers from delusions about her son Sebastian which differ greatly from the actual circumstances surrounding his life and death. George Haverstick in Period of Adjustment exclaims loudly to his war buddies that he is a great lover in order to hide from them the true nature of his fears of sexual inadequacy. In The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore Mrs. Goforth, who is afraid of death and the terrors usually associated with death, lies to herself and others about the reality of her terminal illness.

Williams is primarily known as a writer of full-length dramas. In all of these works, characters who behave as escapists can be found. Therefore, each of these long plays should be included in a complete study of Williams and the theme of escapism. However, in order to adhere to the limited scope and purpose of this thesis, only five plays have been selected to be examined. These five dramas are fully representative of the larger body of Williams' work and include The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, Camino Real, Sweet Bird of Youth, and The Night of the Iguana. These works are significant since each depicts more than one character who acts as an escapist for a variety of reasons, using a variety of methods. Also, in each play there are examples of Williams' use of symbols to highlight the

escapist behavior of his characters. However, the primary reason behind the choice of these five plays to be analyzed in this thesis is the fact that they best present what seem to be Williams' three approaches to the theme of escapism. In the first place, The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire are set realistically at specific times and in specific locations. They contain characters who pursue escapist activities until some type of unhappiness or destruction comes their way. The limitations inherent in the realistic world of these escapists prevent them from successfully eluding whatever it is that troubles them. Secondly, in Camino Real Williams provides a few of his escapists with a much different fate. This drama is a fantasy play set at no particular time in the plaza of an unspecified tropical seaport. It unrealistically combines contemporary character types with those from history, literature, and legend. As a fantasy, the work is not bound by any of the restrictions normally associated with realism. Thus Williams permits some characters to flee unharmed from the plaza across the Terra Incognita into a better world. Finally, Sweet Bird of Youth and The Night of the Iguana are also realistic Williams' dramas. However, in addition to the escapists in each play who persist until they are struck by misfortune, each work contains one character who learns to abandon his escapist behavior and accept life in the real world. A belief in the power of endurance gives these characters the strength they need to face adversities instead of running away from them. Since Williams himself has commented several times in essays and interviews about the relationship between

the life of the creative artist and the content of his work, a study of the theme of escapism in his plays should probably begin with an examination of escapism in Williams' own life.

II. WILLIAMS AND ESCAPISM

Tennessee Williams' concern with escapism is evident not only in many of his literary works but also in statements he has made about his life. Although it is usually undesirable to rely too heavily upon an author's biography to explain what he has written, it is possible to find interesting associations between Williams' life and the theme of escape in his plays. Williams uses some of the experiences he has had in his own lifetime as a basis for several of the characterizations in his plays. This is important to consider since, as the playwright himself says, "Character is my specialty."¹ Williams gives attention to escapism in his dramas because the subject interests him. This fact is implied by his declaration, "I can't write a line about anything that bores me."² From his life he takes particular patterns of behavior which he feels are common to most men, such as the natural tendency to try to avoid unpleasant realities in the world, and uses them to create significant dramatic works. Thus Williams' numerous escapists are interesting characters representing one facet of the human condition who were created by a man who could understand them and sympathize with them since he too had found himself unable to cope

¹ Quoted in Jerry Parker, "Tennessee Williams," Houston Chronicle, 12 Nov. 1972, Zest Magazine, p. 9.

² Tennessee Williams, "Questions Without Answers," New York Times, 3 Oct. 1948, Sec. 2, p. 3.

with the pressures of the real world.

It is significant that Williams explains why he began to write in terms of escapism. He says, "At the age of 14 I discovered writing as an escape from a world of reality in which I felt acutely uncomfortable. It immediately became my place of retreat, my cave, my refuge. From what? From being called a sissy by the neighborhood kids, and Miss Nancy by my father."³ Before he became a writer, Williams had had other ways of avoiding contact with the real world. Benjamin Nelson relates that Tennessee and his sister Rose would use a deck of cards to act out adventures like the siege of Troy. Also, they would close their eyes and use their imaginations to visualize characters and scenes from The Arabian Nights. While in bed during a lengthy recovery from diphtheria, Williams continued to fantasize privately.⁴ In addition, as Nancy Tischler notes, after Rose passed beyond childhood and thus left him without a playmate, Williams read in order to blot out the unpleasant world he was left alone in.⁵ Going to the movies was another avenue of escape for Williams. "When I was little," the playwright says, "I used to want to climb into the screen and join the action. My mother had to hold me down."⁶ However, as the years went

³ Tennessee Williams, "Williams' Wells of Violence," New York Times, 8 March 1959, Sec. 2, p. 1.

⁴ Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work (New York: Ivan Obolensky, Inc., 1961), pp. 4-5.

⁵ Nancy M. Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan (New York: The Citadel Press, 1965), p. 29.

⁶ Quoted in Tischler, Tennessee Williams, p. 31.

by and he continued to feel uncomfortable in reality, writing became his primary means of escape from the world. Williams makes this clear when he states, "A poet's work is his escape from his life--at least in my case."⁷ John Gassner observes not only that Williams developed early in life a tendency to try to flee from things which bothered him but also that writing, his most habitual method of flight, was the one escape that enabled Williams to find himself as a person.⁸

Williams once commented in an interview, "Well, I'm a compulsive writer--because what I am doing is creating imaginary worlds into which I can retreat from the real world because . . . I've never made any kind of adjustment to the real world."⁹ Williams has definite ideas about the value of the worlds he creates through his writing in attempts to avoid being destroyed by reality. He expresses his belief that without his own worlds he would not be able to survive by saying, "It is amazing and frightening how completely one's whole being becomes absorbed in the making of a play. It is almost as if you were frantically constructing another world while the world that you live in dissolves beneath your feet, and that your survival depends on completing this construction at least one second before the old habitation

⁷ Quoted in Gilbert Maxwell, Tennessee Williams and Friends (New York: World Publishing Company, 1965), p. 220.

⁸ John Gassner, Theatre at the Crossroads: Plays and Playwrights of the Mid-Century American Stage (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 80.

⁹ Quoted in John E. Booth and Lewis Funke, "Williams on Williams," Theatre Arts, 46, No. 1 (1962), 73.

collapses."¹⁰ Williams is a confirmed hypochondriac. According to Lincoln Barnett, it is only in his imaginary worlds that the playwright can escape being morbidly concerned with his body and all its illnesses.¹¹ In addition to worrying about his physical condition, Williams is also interested in his own mental health. He explains how his literary efforts have helped him avoid trouble in this area when he says, "I'm very happy that I had writing as an outlet to my reaction to experience. Otherwise, I would have gone really off my trolley. That's the only thing that saved me."¹² Even Edwina Dakin Williams, the playwright's mother, is aware of the dual purpose served by her son's writing. She observes that he creates in order to escape madness and the threat of death and not merely to keep himself entertained.¹³

Williams' daily writing routine consists of rising about seven o'clock in the morning and working at his typewriter three and one-half or four hours. Usually he swims in the afternoon, but may return to work if he is bored with everything else.¹⁴ At times, however, he either reaches an impasse while hard at work on one of his full-length

¹⁰ Tennessee Williams, "On the 'Camino Real,'" New York Times, 15 March 1953, Sec. 2, p. 1.

¹¹ Lincoln Barnett, "Tennessee Williams," Life, 16 Feb. 1948, p. 114.

¹² Quoted in Edwina Dakin Williams, Remember Me To Tom (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), p. 241.

¹³ Edwina Williams, Remember Me To Tom, p. 252.

¹⁴ Booth and Funke, "Williams on Williams," p. 73.

plays or becomes so tired that he is dissatisfied with what he has written. Then, he says, in order to escape these frustrations, "since I can't just stop working, I divert myself with some shorter project, a story, a poem, or a less ponderous play."¹⁵ Williams often revises his longer plays again and again until he arrives at the version he is most happy with. In addition to striving for artistic perfection, however, he has another reason for making revisions. In Williams' words, "when you can't do any more with it [a play] , it ceases to be the center of your life. You feel very forsaken by that, that's why I love revising and revising, because it delays the moment when there is this separation between you and the work."¹⁶ Thus he revises in order to avoid the sense of loss which he feels when a work he has been involved with for some time is finally completed.

Another escape mechanism that Williams has had experience with during his life is the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Since writing is of primary importance to him as a means of escaping reality, it is interesting that his drinking is often associated with his writing. Williams is quite aware of his compulsive need to create literary works. He also is haunted by the belief that to love anything deeply puts him in the vulnerable position of being a possible loser of that which he desires the most.¹⁷ Perhaps instead of things

¹⁵ Tennessee Williams, "Preface to Slapstick Tragedy," Esquire, 64, No. 2 (1965), 95.

¹⁶ Quoted in Joanne Stang, "Williams: 20 Years After 'Glass Menagerie,'" New York Times, 28 March 1965, Sec. 2, p. 3.

¹⁷ Williams, "Wells of Violence," Sec. 2, p. 1.

he "loves" one might substitute things he "depends on" and thus consider Williams' admitted dependence upon writing for escape. This would then help to explain why he is so afraid that the day will come when he will sit down at his typewriter and receive no creative inspiration. As he says, "There is nothing I can do to get rid of this fear, not even psychiatry can help. I drink to enable me to live with it."¹⁸

Williams' use of alcohol often begins early in the day. When he starts writing, he usually drinks coffee. However, as he told one reporter, "after the first hour or so, my nerves begin to get jangled from the coffee. I've had a neurocirculatory asthma for years, and if I don't have my first drink then or stick my head out of the window, I start to gasp and have a spasm."¹⁹ In one 1962 interview Williams estimated that he drank a half of a fifth of liquor a day, while a friend of his said a more realistic estimate would be a half of a fifth each of bourbon and vodka.²⁰ Williams admits that at cocktail parties in New York "I drink the martinis almost as fast as I can snatch them from the tray."²¹ In time his reliance upon alcohol became so great, Tischler notes, that he would leave a restaurant if its

¹⁸ Quoted in Donahue, Dramatic World of Williams, p. 124.

¹⁹ Quoted in "Talk with the Playwright," Newsweek, 23 March 1959, p. 75.

²⁰ "The Angel of the Odd," Time, 9 March 1962, p. 54.

²¹ Tennessee Williams, "Concerning the Timeless World of a Play," New York Times, 14 Jan. 1951, Sec. 2, p. 1.

bar were closed and return home where his liquor was even if he did not particularly want a drink.²² Also, in Williams' words, "I couldn't walk down a street unless I could see a bar--not because I wanted a drink, but because I wanted the security of knowing it was there."²³

Williams' use of drugs can also be traced to his need to continue writing and thus escape from the real world into imaginary worlds of his own. He describes his actions by explaining, "Sleep is absolutely essential to me if I'm to do my work. Four hours is adequate, but I became a pill freak because I wasn't even getting that. . . . When I got up in the morning after all the sedation, I gave myself speed injections administered intramuscularly. It was the only way I could write."²⁴ Often Williams combines his intake of liquor with his intake of drugs. He says, "I am giving away no trade secret when I point out how many artists, including writers, have sought refuge in psychiatry, alcohol, narcotics."²⁵

Williams refers to the whole decade of the 1960's as "My Stoned Age."²⁶ There were times when he would take half a Dexamy1 and one

²² Tischler, Tennessee Williams, p. 246.

²³ Quoted in Tischler, Tennessee Williams, p. 246.

²⁴ Quoted in Rex Reed, "Tennessee Williams Turns Sixty," Esquire, 76, No. 3 (1971), 105, 103.

²⁵ Tennessee Williams, "Tennessee Williams Presents His POV," New York Times Magazine, 12 June 1960, Sec. 6, p. 78.

²⁶ Quoted in Ann Holmes, "The Spotlight: 'Baby, I've Come Back to Life,'" Houston Chronicle, 17 Oct. 1971, Zest Magazine, p. 15.

and one-half Seconals during the day and then drink Scotch and take two Miltowns before he went to bed at night.²⁷ Williams recalls that he once washed down a goof-ball with a martini at dinner in order to avoid being dull later at a party.²⁸ Finally, in 1969, Williams was put in a St. Louis hospital by his brother in order to treat the results of what was termed "prolonged use of a variety of sleeping pills."²⁹ He was released after staying two months and withdrawing "cold turkey" from the effects of these drugs.³⁰ During the last year, however, Williams has been quoted as saying that his nightmare is now over. As he told Rex Reed, "I'm well now. I'm off the booze and I only take two Miltowns and half of a Nembutal a day."³¹ Another reporter notes that the playwright's daily intake of liquor is down to one martini in the morning and another at night.³² Williams recognizes only too well the nature of his existence during the past decade. He characterizes his life then as "deep under the influence of pills and liquor around the clock. I don't know what I was doing if I wasn't trying to find an easy way out. . . . I was only interested

²⁷ "Angel of the Odd," p. 54.

²⁸ Tennessee Williams, "Tennessee, Never Talk to an Actress," New York Times, 4 May 1969, Sec. 2, p. 16.

²⁹ "Tennessee Williams Ill," New York Times, 4 Oct. 1969, Sec. 1, p. 24.

³⁰ Tom Buckley, "Tennessee Williams Survives," The Atlantic, 226, No. 5 (1970), 104.

³¹ Quoted in Reed, "Williams Turns Sixty," p. 105.

³² Ann Holmes, "No More Dying, Insists Tennessee, in Alley Visit," Houston Chronicle, 21 Nov. 1971, Sec. 4, p. 6.

in sedation and the shots and writing, that was all. It was a retreat from life, a protracted death wish that lasted roughly from 1963 until my release from the psychiatric hospital."³³ Williams explains that he has never taken heroin "because that's the end, baby. Pills and booze are a slow means to an end, but heroin is the end itself."³⁴ He says that although he has thought from time to time about committing suicide, the ultimate escape from life, he will probably never do it.³⁵

Another example of Williams' behavior as an escapist is his tendency to resort to flight whenever he is pressured by reality. Again, this action can be related to his writing. According to Williams, "I still believe that a writer's safety . . . lies in one of two things, whichever one is more personally suitable to him--living in a remote place, particularly on an island in the tropics, or in a fugitive way of life, running like a fox from place to place. I have tried both and am still trying both."³⁶ Williams often flees after the opening of one of his longer plays. He is very much aware of the strain involved in putting a drama on the stage. Referring to the ultimate effect that the special stresses related to a Broadway opening night have on him he says, "I'm a very tense person. If you put a very

³³ Quoted in Reed, "Williams Turns Sixty," pp. 105, 108.

³⁴ Quoted in Reed, "Williams Turns Sixty," p. 223.

³⁵ Quoted in Reed, "Williams Turns Sixty," pp. 105, 108.

³⁶ Tennessee Williams, "Prelude to a Comedy," New York Times, 6 Nov. 1960, Sec. 2, p. 3.

tense person . . . into the terrifying tensions of putting on a Broadway play--he's pushing his luck you know, he's gonna crack."³⁷ After a play is performed, the spotlight turns to the critics who pronounce their judgments about the merits and deficiencies of the production. Since the first reviews Williams received about his play Orpheus Descending were bad, he immediately reserved a seat on an airplane flight from New York to Hong Kong. However, he overslept the next morning, missed the plane, and decided not to make another reservation only when the afternoon reviews of the play were much better.³⁸ After the critical failure of In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, Williams admits that "Anne Meacham and I ran away to Japan . . . to escape the brutality of the press."³⁹

In addition to trying to avoid the pressures which threaten him because of the failure of one of his major plays, Williams also tries to get away from what he considers to be the unpleasant consequences of a play being a hit. After the successful opening of The Glass Menagerie in Chicago in 1945, Williams notes that "I . . . returned to my parents' home in St. Louis as a refugee from the shock of sudden fame."⁴⁰ He then lived in New York for a while, but became increasingly depressed and dissatisfied with his new way of life. Finally

³⁷ Quoted in Booth and Funke, "Williams on Williams," p. 19.

³⁸ Stang, "Williams: 20 Years After," Sec. 2, p. 3.

³⁹ Quoted in Reed, "Williams Turns Sixty," p. 108.

⁴⁰ Tennessee Williams, "The Writing is Honest," New York Times, 16 March 1958, Sec. 2, p. 3.

after about three months, he says, "I decided to have another eye operation, mainly because of the excuse it gave me to withdraw from the world behind a gauze mask."⁴¹ When he was released from the hospital he made his escape complete by fleeing to Mexico where he could "quickly forget the false dignities and conceits imposed by success."⁴² Williams also reports that in 1948 "when I was myself a victim of the false intensities that seemed to follow on the transformation of a creative writer to a public figure, . . . I followed the instinctive reaction of running away. I cut out for Europe."⁴³

Tennessee Williams has made several statements which seem to indicate what he feels to be the relationship between events in his life and the content of his plays. To one interviewer he admitted, "Frankly there must be some limitations in me as a dramatist. I can't handle people in routine situations. I must find characters to correspond to my own tensions."⁴⁴ Furthermore, he has said, "I cannot write about anything I don't feel. . . . I am a deeply disturbed person and I write about disturbed people."⁴⁵ Such statements about Williams' method of characterization are significant since, in his words, "My chief aim in

⁴¹ Tennessee Williams, "On a Streetcar Named Success," New York Times, 30 Nov. 1947, Sec. 2, p. 3.

⁴² Williams, "Streetcar Named Success," Sec. 2, p. 3.

⁴³ Williams, "Prelude to a Comedy," Sec. 2, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Quoted in "The Playwright: Man Named Tennessee," Newsweek, 1 April 1957, p. 81.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Donahue, Dramatic World of Williams, p. 211.

playwriting is the creation of character."⁴⁶ Perhaps he makes the connection between his own episodes of escapism and the escapist tendencies of his characters the most specific when he explains, "I can't expose a human weakness on the stage unless I know it through having it myself."⁴⁷ He expresses a similar idea when he says, "I have never written about any kind of vice which I can't observe in myself."⁴⁸ When asked by a reporter in 1962 if he planned in the future to write any historical dramas, Williams reaffirmed his allegiance to using his life as a basis for his art and replied, "No, I don't think so. I couldn't create anything outside my own experience. I must draw characters from people I know."⁴⁹ On literary works in general Williams comments, "If the writing is honest it cannot be separated from the man who wrote it. It isn't so much his mirror as it is the distillation, the essence, of what is strongest and purest in his nature, whether that be gentleness or anger, serenity or torment, light or dark."⁵⁰ He admits that it is sometimes "sad and embarrassing and unattractive that those emotions that stir him [a writer] deeply enough to demand expression . . . are nearly all rooted . . . in the

⁴⁶ Quoted in R. C. Lewis, "A Playwright Named Tennessee," New York Times Magazine, 7 Dec. 1947, Sec. 6, p. 67.

⁴⁷ Williams, "Wells of Violence," Sec. 2, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Randolph Goodman, Drama on Stage (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 294.

⁴⁹ Quoted in "Tennessee Williams May Desert 'Southern Belles' for Mysticism," New York Times, 2 Aug. 1962, Sec. 1, p. 16.

⁵⁰ Williams, "Writing is Honest," Sec. 2, p. 1.

particular and sometimes peculiar concerns of the artist himself."⁵¹ Williams has a great deal of admiration for Marcel Proust and the way in which he incorporated his life into his writing. It is Williams' conviction that "the writers of our times can use the method of Proust, that of transposing the contents of his life into a creative synthesis of it. Only in this way can a writer justify his life and work."⁵²

In addition to being aware of his own experiences with escapism, Williams has also observed during his life the various reactions made by his father, mother, and sister when they were confronted by harsh realities with which they could not cope. The personalities of Williams' parents were quite different. Nelson describes Williams' father Cornelius as blunt, rough, quick-tempered, and blustery, and his mother Edwina as small, bird-like, composed, and proper.⁵³ Norman Fedder notes that in addition to the other benefits offered to Cornelius Williams by his job as a traveling shoe salesman, his trips enabled him to escape the company of his wife whose prim nature was upset by his bawdiness.⁵⁴ However, the lives of everyone in the family were greatly changed by one simple act on the part of the shoe company. When Tennessee was eight years old, Cornelius was promoted to sales

⁵¹ Tennessee Williams, "Williams: Person-To-Person," New York Times, 20 March 1955, Sec. 2, p. 1.

⁵² Williams, "Prelude to a Comedy," Sec. 2, p. 3.

⁵³ Nelson, Tennessee Williams, pp. 1-3.

⁵⁴ Norman J. Fedder, The Influence of D. H. Lawrence on Tennessee Williams (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966), p. 13.

manager and transferred to St. Louis, Missouri.⁵⁵ Because of his new position, Williams' father was no longer able to go on the selling jaunts which had given him so much pleasure. This was especially unfortunate for Cornelius because, according to his son, he was inflicted with "a restlessness that would have driven him mad without the release of liquor and poker and wild week-ends."⁵⁶ The playwright also states, "After he quit 'the road' my father was a terribly unhappy man who could only escape his great unhappiness through the bottle, poker, and the great esteem and affection of the salesmen who worked under him."⁵⁷ The living conditions in St. Louis were quite different from those the family had enjoyed in Mississippi. Edwina Williams, unfortunately, was never able to adjust to the new life. Nelson reports that she postured and pretended in order to recapture the sense of gentility she was convinced the family had lost by living below its station in the city.⁵⁸ Also, according to an interview with the playwright in Time, Mrs. Williams deluded herself with somewhat inaccurate memories of a glorious Southern past.⁵⁹ These illusions were doubtless the only way she could escape being overwhelmed by the frustrating realities of her urban existence. Tennessee's older sister, Rose Williams, was even more

⁵⁵ Tischler, Tennessee Williams, p. 24.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Edwina Williams, Remember Me To Tom, p. 202.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Walter Wager, ed., The Playwrights Speak (New York: Delacorte Press, 1967), p. 215.

⁵⁸ Nelson, Tennessee Williams, p. 31.

⁵⁹ "Angel of the Odd," p. 55.

unable to cope with the harshness of St. Louis. It was there, Tischler reports, that Rose began her withdrawal from the world. She was unhappy in the city, and, unlike her brother who wrote to escape his frustrations, had no outlet for her anxieties. She had attained puberty, but was unable to deal with the shock of maturing. Also, she was upset by the conflicts produced in the family when her father's new job enabled him to spend more time than ever before at home. Rose retreated deeper and deeper into herself until she escaped completely from life and became an incurable schizophrenic. Finally, she had to be committed to a mental institution.⁶⁰ Gilbert Maxwell notes that Rose's tragedy provided a strong stimulus for Williams' creative energies. He wrote compulsively because in his writing he could find a much-needed refuge from the grief which the fate of his sister caused him to feel.⁶¹

As it is in the case of the playwright himself, the purpose of studying the escapist activities of members of Williams' family is not merely to point out similarities between their actions and those of characters in Williams' plays. Instead, the desire is to provide a background or frame of reference in which Williams' development as both a man and a dramatist can be better understood. As a man, Williams could remember the experiences of his family and realize that both their attempts at escapism as well as his own sometimes created worse

⁶⁰ Tischler, Tennessee Williams, pp. 29, 54.

⁶¹ Maxwell, Tennessee Williams, p. 28.

problems than those they were intended to solve. As a dramatist, Williams could use his artistic abilities to endow characters with escapist tendencies and thus write plays that were sensitive presentations of the struggle that often accompanies man's attempt to deal with an unpleasant environment.

III. THE GLASS MENAGERIE

The Glass Menagerie is an appropriate play with which to begin a study of the theme of escapism in the dramatic works of Tennessee Williams for at least two reasons. In the first place, it was the first of Williams' major plays to be both a critical and financial success. After premiering at the Civic Theater in Chicago on December 26, 1944, The Glass Menagerie opened on Broadway at the Playhouse Theater on March 31, 1945.¹ Williams' Battle of Angels, an earlier full-length drama, had been scheduled for a New York opening in 1941. However, when it was tried out at the Wilbur Theater in Boston on December 30, 1940, the performance was such a disaster that the play closed there and did not go on to another city. Seventeen years were to pass before Battle of Angels, rewritten extensively by Williams and given the new title Orpheus Descending, opened on Broadway at the Martin Beck Theater on March 21, 1957.² In the second place, every character in The Glass Menagerie, including one man who never actually appears in person on the stage, is in some way or another an escapist. Each of these characters has his reasons for the attempts he makes to avoid reality. Each character uses different methods in trying to

¹ Paul M. Cubeta, Modern Drama for Analysis, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), p. 219.

² Nelson, Tennessee Williams, pp. ix-x, 223-24.

accomplish his escape. However, not all of these escapists are completely successful in their efforts to live in worlds other than those in which they actually find themselves. What is significant about The Glass Menagerie is the way in which the behavior of these escapists motivates action and produces conflict in the play. The lives of the characters are so closely entwined that the same deeds which solve problems for one person by enabling him to flee from the unpleasantness of reality often form the basis for another person's dissatisfaction with the real world.

The Glass Menagerie, a memory play in seven scenes, depicts certain events in the life of the Wingfield family in an apartment in a St. Louis tenement in the 1930's. The plot concerns the desire of Amanda, the mother, to persuade her son Tom to invite his fellow worker Jim O'Connor home as a gentleman caller for her daughter Laura. Jim does come to dinner one evening, but his announcement that he is engaged to be married thwarts Amanda's plan that he become Laura's suitor. As this summary would indicate, the interesting feature of the play as far as either a playgoer or a reader is concerned is not a complex, ingenious, many-faceted story line. Instead, Williams' characterizations and the motives behind his characters' actions and attitudes are of primary importance. In almost every case, the major motivation for characters in The Glass Menagerie is a wish to escape from reality into some better world.

The pattern for most of the action in The Glass Menagerie is provided by a character who is represented on the stage only by his

photograph. He is Mr. Wingfield, Amanda's husband and the father of Tom and Laura. Since he is not present to speak for himself, information concerning Mr. Wingfield must be gleaned from comments made about him by members of his family. As the play opens, for example, Tom refers to a large picture of a smiling man in a World War I army cap by saying, "This is our father who left us a long time ago. He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances; he gave up his job with the telephone company and skipped the light fantastic out of town."³ Amanda does not disagree with Tom when he calls her marriage a mistake. Instead, she tries to defend herself and explain something about her husband's personality by saying, "That innocent look of your father's had everyone fooled! He smiled--the world was enchanted!" (p. 56) and "One thing your father had plenty of--was charm!" (p. 21). Information about Mr. Wingfield's life with his family before he deserted them is also provided by Amanda. She becomes concerned when she notices that her son is beginning to copy some of the actions of her husband. She complains to Tom, "More and more you remind me of your father! He was out all hours without explanation!" (p. 42). When Tom announces that he is bringing Jim O'Connor home to dinner, Amanda quizzes him about Jim's drinking habits.

AMANDA: Tom, he--doesn't drink?

TOM: Why do you ask me that?

AMANDA: Your father did!

TOM: Don't get started on that! (p. 53)

³ Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie, The New Classics (New York: New Directions, 1949), pp. 5-6. All further quotations from this edition will be indicated parenthetically.

These remarks point out Amanda's disapproving attitude toward another of her husband's activities.

This behavior by Mr. Wingfield, drinking and staying out late at night, was no doubt part of his early efforts to escape from a home life that was not altogether pleasant for him. John Gassner feels that one reason for Mr. Wingfield's reluctance to stay at home was his desire to avoid hearing his wife's pretensions about her glorious youth in Blue Mountain.⁴ Also, the physical condition of the apartment and neighborhood the family lived in probably had something to do with his developing escapist tendencies. With regard to this idea, Williams' description of the Wingfields' home in St. Louis is significant for the mood of gloom and depression that it conveys. In Williams' words,

The Wingfield apartment is in the rear of the building, one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centers of lower middle-class population and are symptomatic of the impulse of this largest and fundamentally enslaved section of American society. . . . At the rise of the curtain, the audience is faced with the dark, grim rear wall of the Wingfield tenement. This building, which runs parallel to the footlights, is flanked on both sides by dark, narrow alleys which run into murky canyons of tangled clothes-lines, garbage cans and the sinister lattice-work of neighboring fire-escapes. (p. 3)

If this were the place in which the family was living at the time of the father's escapist activities, and Williams gives no indication that it was not, then it is no wonder that Mr. Wingfield was unhappy

⁴ John Gassner, "Tennessee Williams: Dramatist of Frustration," College English, 10 (1948), 6.

there and ready to seize whatever opportunities he could to avoid either being at home or even thinking about his home clearly. There must have come a time, however, when drinking and spending late nights out of the apartment were no longer sufficient escape mechanisms for Mr. Wingfield. Eventually, his desperate desire to avoid the responsibilities of being the head of a household, combined with a natural wanderlust and craving for personal freedom, caused him to abandon his wife and children and flee elsewhere.

Of all the escapes attempted by characters in The Glass Menagerie, the one performed by Mr. Wingfield is the most complete and the most successful. When Jim O'Connor comes to dinner, Tom points out his father's picture and comments, "See how he grins? And he's been absent going on sixteen years!" (p. 77). Amanda describes her husband to Jim as "A telephone man who--fell in love with long-distance!--Now he travels and I don't even know where!" (p. 80). In his role as narrator Tom says, "The last we heard of him [father] was a picture post-card from Mazatlan, on the Pacific coast of Mexico, containing a message of two words--'Hello--Good-bye!' and no address" (p. 6). Except for this card, there is no indication in the play that he ever communicated with his family again. Mr. Wingfield's desertion of his family has a rather mixed effect upon them. In a way, both the photograph and phonograph records that he leaves behind him offer encouragement to Tom, Amanda, and Laura whenever the reality of their own situations in St. Louis becomes too much for them to bear. The objects help them to believe that escape from their troubles is possible by

reminding them of one member of the family who was able to outrun his problems. This is not to say, however, that the three of them wholeheartedly approve of Mr. Wingfield's actions. They are, of course, very much aware that his abandoning them caused them hardships and contributed to their own dissatisfaction with their lives. Tom, for example, would like to be a poet. Unfortunately, his father's departure placed him in the role of the family breadwinner and tied him to a warehouse job which he hates and longs to escape from. At any rate, as Edward Callahan says, Mr. Wingfield is patron of a family whose traditional solution for any problem is escape.⁵

According to William Sharp, the conflict that Tennessee Williams is most concerned with in his plays is the struggle that goes on inside his characters between what society says they are or ought to be and what they themselves feel they are or ought to be.⁶ For Amanda Wingfield in The Glass Menagerie, this conflict involves not only her feelings about her own life but also her attitude toward her children. Since Amanda cannot easily accept the reality of her family's situation in St. Louis, she struggles to believe that they are all better than they seem and thus acts as an escapist. Her methods of escape include fantasizing, role-playing, self-delusion, and lying. Robert Jones feels that Amanda's refusal to face reality stems from one extremely

⁵ Edward F. Callahan, "Tennessee Williams' Two Worlds," North Dakota Quarterly, 25 (1957), 64-65.

⁶ William Sharp, "An Unfashionable View of Tennessee Williams," Tulane Drama Review, 6, No. 3 (1962), 160.

crucial experience in the real world, Mr. Wingfield's desertion of her, which shocked her into a fear of actuality.⁷

Amanda's marriage took her from her home in the South and eventually brought her north to live in the St. Louis tenement she occupies at the beginning of the play. After being abandoned by her husband, she was faced with the very real problem of trying to raise and care for her children. Then comes the depression, and she must see that herself, her restless son, and her crippled daughter are all provided for. As Amanda admits, "I wasn't prepared for what the future brought me" (p. 80). Her unsuccessful attempts to bring in money by soliciting magazine subscriptions over the telephone at 7:30 a.m. may seem comical to an outsider, but were no doubt frustrating to her. In order to compensate for these frustrations as well as for her dissatisfaction with life in the apartment, she retreats mentally into the past and tells stories about her former life in Blue Mountain. As Williams says, Amanda is a woman "clinging frantically to another time and place" (p. vii). The frequency with which she escapes into these memories is implied by this exchange between Tom and Laura:

AMANDA: (Crossing out to kitchenette. Airily)
 Sometimes they [gentlemen callers] come when
 they are least expected! Why, I remember one
 Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain--(Enters
kitchenette.)
 TOM: I know what's coming!
 LAURA: Yes. But let her tell it.
 TOM: Again?

⁷ Robert Emmet Jones, "Tennessee Williams' Early Heroines," Modern Drama, 2 (1959), 217.

LAURA: She loves to tell it.

(AMANDA returns with bowl of dessert.)

AMANDA: One Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain--your mother received--seventeen!--gentlemen callers! (p. 8)

Recollections about gentlemen callers are of primary importance to Amanda as she tries to avoid thinking about some of the unpleasant realities of her present life. According to her, "My callers were gentlemen--all! Among my callers were some of the most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta--planters and sons of planters!" (pp. 9-10). She reminisces enthusiastically about one particular spring in Blue Mountain during which "Invitations poured in--parties all over the Delta!--'Stay in bed,' said Mother, 'you have fever!'--but I just wouldn't.--I took quinine but kept on going, going!--Evenings, dances!--Afternoons, long, long rides! Picnics--lovely!" (p. 65). There probably is some factual basis for all these stories. However, it is quite likely that exaggeration, a natural tendency to romanticize about the past, and a fondness for flowery language on Amanda's part also contributed to the content of her memories. Indeed, if these recollections turned out to be pure fantasy instead of only part fantasy, they would be even more significant as an example of Amanda's use of escape mechanisms.

Another motivation for Amanda's retreat into the past could be her fear or dislike of growing old. In Blue Mountain, as she tells it, she was young, attractive, and besieged by many beaux. In describing herself as she was then to Tom she says, "It wasn't enough for a girl to be possessed of a pretty face and a graceful figure--although I wasn't

slighted in either respect. She also needed to have a nimble wit and a tongue to meet all occasions" (p. 9). Even if all the other aspects of her life in the South were fabrications, the truth would remain that when Amanda lived in Blue Mountain she was young. It is this feeling of youth that she tries to recapture through her memories in order to escape, if only for a little while, the realization that she is middle-aged. During a discussion of gentlemen callers with Laura, Amanda "flounces girlishly" (p. 11). She refers to Laura not as her daughter but as "little sister" (p. 8) and says, "It's almost time for our gentlemen callers to start arriving" (p. 11) [italics mine].

Amanda's most obvious attempts to be young again occur when Jim O'Connor comes to dinner. She plays the role of the vivacious Southern belle in an appropriate costume. As Williams describes her, "She wears a girlish frock of yellowed voile with a blue silk sash. She carries a bunch of jonquils--the legend of her youth is nearly revived" (p. 65). She even manages to wear her hair in "girlish ringlets" (p. 78). After being introduced to Jim, she breaks into "girlish laughter" (p. 104) and the same "gay laughter and chatter" (p. 78) that characterize all her speeches about her youth in Blue Mountain.

According to Williams, "Amanda, having failed to establish contact with reality, continues to live vitally in her illusions" (p. vii). These illusions are present in her attitude toward her son and daughter as well as in her beliefs about her own past. Amanda often makes remarks which reveal her desire to view Tom and Laura as different from or better than they actually are. She probably says these things in

order to escape the disappointment that she would feel if she acknowledged her children's lack of accomplishments. Amanda declares to Tom, "Why, you--you're just full of natural endowments! Both of my children--they're unusual children! Don't you think I know it? I'm so--proud!" (p. 36). When Tom is somewhat rude and disrespectful at the dinner table, Amanda dismisses his actions by saying, "Temperament like a Metropolitan star!" (p. 7). The truth is, even though Tom is an aspiring poet, he has done nothing that would warrant his lack of manners being attributed to an artistic temperament and thereby excused. He is simply a restless warehouse worker who brings home a modest salary. Amanda also deludes herself with regard to her daughter. When Laura mentions that she is crippled, Amanda disagrees by saying, "Nonsense! Laura, I've told you never, never to use that word. Why, you're not crippled, you just have a little defect--hardly noticeable, even!" (p. 21). A further example of the unrealistic attitude Amanda tries to perpetuate about Laura can be found in this conversation between Tom and his mother:

AMANDA: . . . When he [Jim O'Connor] sees how lovely and sweet and pretty she is, he'll thank his lucky stars he was asked to dinner.

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

AMANDA: What do you mean?

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

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

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

AMANDA: What do you mean 'not all'?

TOM: Laura is very different from other girls.

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

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

AMANDA: Don't say peculiar. (p. 58)

Laura's real situation, of course, is that of a crippled, shy young woman who lives in the world of her glass menagerie. When a gentleman caller finally comes for her daughter, Amanda extends her illusions about Laura to include him as well. As Jan Austell observes, Amanda tries to convince herself that Jim O'Connor, actually only an average young man who has so far failed to achieve the level of success that his high school friends thought would be his, is an outstanding youth with a bright future who will respond to Laura's sweet nature and be glad to marry her.⁸ After Jim arrives at the apartment, Amanda tells several lies in swift succession in order to have Laura make a favorable impression on him. After all, if he should like Laura enough to marry her, then Amanda would escape having an old maid daughter. In response to her son's question about dinner being ready, Amanda, who has actually been the cook, replies, "Honey, you go ask Sister if supper is ready! You know that Sister is in full charge of supper!" (p. 79). After Tom leaves the room she tells Jim, "It's rare for a girl as sweet an' pretty as Laura to be domestic! But Laura is, thank heavens, not only pretty but also very domestic. I'm not at all. I never was a bit" (p. 80). By the time everyone is ready to eat, Laura's shyness has

⁸ Jan Austell, What's In a Play? (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), p. 102.

caused her to feel faint and weak. In order to cover up the real reason for her daughter's condition Amanda lies and says, "Standing over the hot stove made her ill--I told her that it was just too warm this evening, but--" (p. 82).

Even though Amanda is an escapist who deludes herself about her family, there are times when she drops her pretenses and looks at life as it really is. For example, she prefers to think of herself as a carefree Blue Mountain belle. However, she acknowledges her economic dependence upon her son and her concern lest he be fired by telling Tom, "What right have you got to jeopardize your job? Jeopardize the security of us all? How do you think we'd manage if you were--" (p. 27). It would be pleasant for Amanda to think of Tom as a diligent worker who was content to stay at home and seek higher paying positions at the warehouse. At one point in the play she tells him, though, "I saw that letter you got from the Merchant Marine. I know what you're dreaming of. I'm not standing here blindfolded" (p. 42). Also, Amanda would probably like nothing better than to believe that her daughter was a normal, active young girl with many gentlemen callers. Only in a moment of desperation does she admit to herself and Tom about Laura, "We have to be making some plans and provisions for her. She's older than you, two years, and nothing has happened. She just drifts along doing nothing. It frightens me terribly how she just drifts along" (p. 41). At the end of the play Amanda makes a statement that reveals the entire family's situation in a totally realistic way. She and Tom are arguing and she tells him, "Go to the movies, go! Don't think about

us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job! Don't let anything interfere with your selfish pleasure!" (p. 122). These moments when Amanda views the real world without the protective mask of her illusions are helpful if one is to understand fully just what it is she is trying to escape from. The fact that she is not always a successful escapist makes her a more interesting and complex character than her husband.

Laura Wingfield's behavior in The Glass Menagerie is also at times a curious mixture of an acceptance of the reality of her situation and a desire to escape from the world around her. Sam Bluefarb observes that Laura, unlike Amanda and Tom, can face the present in so far as she accepts the truth about herself in that present.⁹ For example, when her mother tells her to prepare to receive gentlemen callers, Laura realistically replies, "I'm not expecting any gentlemen callers" (p. 8). Amanda continues to fantasize about them until Laura finally tells her and Tom, "I'm just not popular like you were in Blue Mountain. . . . Mother's afraid I'm going to be an old maid" (p. 12). Laura is also able to admit to her family, "I'm--crippled!" (p. 21). These statements represent some of the adjustments Laura has made during the years to her life in the apartment. She accepts these facts because she has grown used to them and they no longer frighten her. However, whenever Laura is suddenly exposed to some new situation outside the apartment or whenever some new person or new idea from the outside

⁹ Sam Bluefarb, "The Glass Menagerie: Three Visions of Time," College English, 24 (1963), 516.

world invades her home, she reacts as an escapist.

One of the most devastating of Laura's experiences away from the apartment occurs when Amanda enrolls her at Rubicam's Business College. She is so shy and terrified that she is sick to her stomach. She then escapes from the school by dropping out after attending only a few classes. As she says, "I couldn't go back up. I--threw up--on the floor!" (p. 18). In order to avoid having her mother find out about her departure from Rubicam's, Laura pretends that she is still going there every day by leaving home and walking in the park. She finally tells Amanda, "I went in the art museum and the bird-houses at the Zoo. I visited the penguins every day! Sometimes I did without lunch and went to the movies. Lately I've been spending most of my afternoons in the Jewel-box, that big glass house where they raise the tropical flowers" (p. 18). Another incident in Laura's life outside the apartment is mentioned by Amanda when she complains to Tom, "I took her over to the Young People's League at the church. Another fiasco. She spoke to nobody, nobody spoke to her" (p. 42). Evidently Laura was so uncomfortable in the presence of these strange people that she was able to escape contact with them by deliberately not starting any conversations.

Laura prefers to stay home where the surroundings are more familiar and she has objects which comfort her. However, there are times when she feels threatened or afraid because of the entrance of something new into the apartment. Activities to which she turns whenever she is upset by these intrusions include handling the figures in her glass

menagerie and playing phonograph records on the victrola. The first time in the play that Laura appears alone on stage, in the words of Williams' stage directions, "She is washing and polishing her collection of glass" (p. 13). Williams makes a point of identifying Laura with the menagerie. After a violent argument with his mother, Tom unsuccessfully attempts to put on his coat and then angrily throws it away. Williams' description of those actions concludes, "It strikes against the shelf of LAURA'S glass collection, there is a tinkle of shattering glass. LAURA cries out as if wounded" (p. 29). The menagerie represents another world which is more pleasant for Laura than the world of reality. Her favorite figure is a glass unicorn which symbolizes both her physical condition and the relationship to other people she would like to enjoy. The unicorn's horn makes it different from the other glass horses just as Laura's crippled leg and shy nature make her different from other people. However, as she tells Jim O'Connor when she shows the unicorn to him, "Well, if he does [feel lonesome] 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" (p. 106). Paul Engle notes that characters who retreat into fantasy whenever they are overcome by reality can be found consistently in Williams' work.¹⁰ Thus whenever the real world that she lives in upsets her, Laura retreats to her make-believe world of glass animals where even unicorns are accepted and happy. For

¹⁰ Paul Engle, "A Locomotive Named Reality," New Republic, 24 Jan. 1955, p. 26.

example, after Amanda and her daughter discuss the latter's brief attempt to attend classes at Rubicam's Business College, Amanda suddenly announces, "Girls that aren't cut out for business careers usually wind up married to some nice man" (p. 21). Williams describes Laura's reaction to this new and disturbing idea by saying, "LAURA utters a startled, doubtful laugh. She reaches quickly for a piece of glass" (p. 21).

The entrance of the gentleman caller, Jim O'Connor, into the apartment is also a new experience which disturbs Laura. Her shyness causes her to feel uneasy around him and while he talks, according to Williams, "She remains by the table and turns in her hands a piece of glass to cover her tumult" (p. 101). Laura's phonograph records and victrola also comfort her during Jim's visit. The records, left behind by her father after he deserted the family, are symbols of escape for Laura as the figures in her glass menagerie are. She uses the victrola in times of stress in an attempt to turn the attention of her mind away from whatever it is that troubles her. When Jim and Tom arrive at the apartment, Amanda asks Laura to open the door for them. Instead of doing as her mother asks, however, shy Laura "Darts to the victrola and winds it frantically and turns it on" (p. 71). During her conversation with Jim after dinner, he reveals that he is in love with a girl named Betty. In order for Laura to escape from her painful disappointment, "She . . . crouches beside the victrola to wind it up" (p. 115). Again, as Jim leaves the apartment after having told Amanda about Betty, "LAURA crouches beside the victrola to wind it" (p. 120).

Earlier in the play Laura takes refuge in her phonograph records when Amanda comes back to the apartment and says she knows about her daughter's fiasco at Rubicam's Business College. When this intrusion of facts from the outside world becomes too much for Laura to bear, "She crosses to the victrola and winds it up" (p. 17). As Paul Cubeta observes, Laura wants to escape hearing her mother's cruel words and thus tries to drown them out with music.¹¹

One facet of Laura's behavior as an escapist which has already been briefly mentioned is her use of illness to avoid unpleasant situations. In discussing the affair at Rubicam's Amanda quotes Laura's typing instructor and tells her daughter, "And she said, 'No--I remember her perfectly now. Her hands shook so that she couldn't hit the right keys! The first time we gave a speed-test, she broke down completely--was sick at the stomach and almost had to be carried into the wash-room! After that morning she never showed up any more'" (p. 16). Later, when Jim O'Connor is waiting to enter the apartment, Laura complains to her mother, "I'm sick!" (p. 70). By the time dinner is ready, Laura is barely able to come to the table. In the words of Williams' stage directions, "The back door is pushed weakly open and LAURA comes in. She is obviously quite faint, her lips trembling, her eyes wide and staring. She moves unsteadily toward the table. . . . LAURA suddenly stumbles--she catches at a chair with a faint moan" (p. 81). Whether or not these illnesses are psychosomatically induced, they are rather effective means of escapism. Being sick at the school and

¹¹ Cubeta, Modern Drama For Analysis, p. 271.

then being embarrassed about it gives Laura just the reason she needs for not continuing her classes. Feeling faint and weak in the apartment enables her to postpone her confrontation with Jim for a little while at least.

Like the other members of his family in The Glass Menagerie, Tom Wingfield uses a variety of escape mechanisms whenever he feels trapped by unpleasant circumstances in the world around him. Although some of his behavior is reminiscent of his father and of Laura, there is one activity which is uniquely Tom's in the play. He is a poet who writes both at home and on the job in order to avoid the frustrations that beset him in those places. Williams emphasizes Tom's literary nature by having Jim O'Connor, one of Tom's fellow workers at the warehouse, give him a special nickname. As Tom says, "He knew of my secret practice of retiring to a cabinet of the wash-room to work on poems when business was slack in the warehouse. He called me Shakespeare" (p. 61). Tom dislikes the job itself and also the fact that he has to get up early in the morning to get to the job. He values his writing because it enables him to live in worlds of his own creation instead of in the real world of the warehouse. Eventually, Tom's writing helps him escape completely from that job and from the unwanted responsibility of being the major provider for his family. According to Tom, "Not long after that [the visit by the gentleman caller] I was fired for writing a poem on the lid of a shoe-box" (p. 123).

At home, Tom's dissatisfaction with his surroundings also causes him to write. Although he loves his mother, her affectations and

pretensions about her youth in Blue Mountain irritate him. She badgers him until he agrees to bring home a gentleman caller for his sister, and then interrogates him about that man's character. Other habits of hers, including her criticism of some of his favorite activities, also upset Tom. During his first scene with Amanda he complains, "I haven't enjoyed one bite of this dinner because of your constant directions on how to eat it. It's you that make me rush through meals with your hawk-like attention to every bite I take" (p. 7). When he leaves the table to get a cigarette, she immediately says, "You smoke too much" (p. 7). Tom is particularly enraged when his mother censors his reading material. Amanda admits to him, "I took that horrible novel back to the library--yes! That hideous book by that insane Mr. Lawrence" (p. 25). Tom views the act as a violation of his personal rights while Amanda thinks she has performed her maternal duty of protecting her son from evil influences. Perhaps the crux of Tom's unhappiness in the apartment is simply the natural conflict between a young man who feels grown up enough to live his life in his own way and a mother who often treats him like a child. At any rate, when Tom is unhappy his writing helps him to forget his troubles. One of the most violent arguments in the play between Tom and Amanda is related to this writing. According to Williams' description of the scene, "An upright typewriter and a wild disarray of manuscripts is on the drop-leaf table. The quarrel was probably precipitated by AMANDA'S interruption of his creative labor" (pp. 25-26).

In addition to writing poetry, drinking and going to the movies

are part of Tom's behavior as an escapist. As Cubeta says, the glass menagerie that Tom retreats to is a movie theater while Laura's is a collection of glass animals and Amanda's is a collection of memories.¹² Whenever his confrontations with his mother become more than he can bear, Tom flees from the apartment and often does not return until the early hours of the morning. After being criticized by Amanda because of the books he reads, for example, he cries out, "No, I won't hear more, I'm going out!" (p. 26). Later, in order to avoid being questioned further by his mother about Jim O'Connor, Tom departs abruptly saying, "I'm going to the movies" (p. 59). Amanda, however, does not believe that her son goes to the movies. She accuses him saying, "I think you've been doing things that you're ashamed of. That's why you act like this. I don't believe that you go every night to the movies. Nobody goes to the movies night after night. Nobody in their right minds goes to the movies as often as you pretend to" (p. 27). The proof that Tom is not lying about his many nights of movie-going is supplied in the play in the stage directions describing his return to the apartment one morning. In Williams' words, "TOM fishes in his pockets for door-key, removing a motley assortment of articles in the search, including a perfect shower of movie-ticket stubs and an empty bottle" (p. 30). On this particular occasion, Tom comes home after he has been drinking. He tells Laura about the magician who performed on the stage of the movie theater changing water into wine, beer, and

¹² Cubeta, Modern Drama For Analysis, p. 272.

then whiskey by pouring it from one pitcher into another. Tom describes his part in the performance by saying, "I know it was whiskey it finally turned into because he needed somebody to come up out of the audience to help him, and I came up--both shows! It was Kentucky Straight Bourbon" (p. 31). The explanation that Tom gives his mother for going to motion pictures is found in the following dialogue:

AMANDA: Why do you go to the movies so much, Tom?

TOM: I go to the movies because--I like adventure.
Adventure is something I don't have much of at work, so I go to the movies.

AMANDA: But, Tom, you go to the movies entirely too much!

TOM: I like a lot of adventure. (p. 39)

He is able to escape both the dull routine of his job at the warehouse and the critical remarks of his mother in the apartment by submerging himself in the adventurous, romantic exploits of actors and actresses.

As Bluefarb observes, however, there comes a time in Tom Wingfield's life when he is no longer satisfied by the synthetic escape found in going to the movies.¹³ One day, instead of merely fleeing to a neighborhood theater, he joins the Merchant Marine and deserts the family as his father did before him. Tom explains his feelings to Jim O'Connor when he tells him, "All of those glamorous people--having adventures--hogging it all, gobbling the whole thing up! You know what happens? People go to the movies instead of moving! . . . But I'm not patient. I don't want to wait till then. I'm tired of the movies and I am about to move!" (p. 76). Williams' attitude toward this ultimate flight of Tom's seems to be one of understanding more than one

¹³ Bluefarb, "Three Visions of Time," p. 515.

of condemnation. He describes Tom by saying, "His nature is not remorseless, but to escape from a trap he has to act without pity" (p. vii). Austell suggests that the major conflict in Tom's life is the struggle between his sense of responsibility to his family and his sense of responsibility to himself.¹⁴ Eventually, it is the latter which triumphs and motivates Tom's flight. He is a desperate man who runs away in order to survive even though he knows his departure will create hardships for Amanda and Laura. He acts selfishly, but he is looking for freedom, a change of pace, and a chance to experience for himself the kind of adventure he has seen in the movies. Perhaps what makes Tom seem deserving of sympathy at the end of the play is the fact that his flight is unsuccessful. He cannot completely escape his memories of his sister. Tom's last speech, containing a catalogue of all the escape mechanisms he has had experience with, expresses this fact quite clearly. As he says,

I left Saint Louis. I descended the steps of this fire-escape for a last time and followed, from then on, in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space-- I traveled around a great deal. . . . Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes . . . Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be! I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger--anything that can blow your candles out! (pp. 123-24)

Amanda once tells Tom, "You live in a dream; you manufacture illusions!" (p. 122). Tom's most important dream in the play is that he will someday be free from his family. Unfortunately for him, however, this is

¹⁴ Austell, What's In a Play?, p. 119.

precisely the dream that he finds to be the most illusory. His memories of Laura and the guilt he feels for having left her follow him everywhere and give him no peace of mind.

The members of the Wingfield family are not the only people in The Glass Menagerie who could be considered escapists. In their own way, both Jim O'Connor and the people in the Paradise Dance Hall are trying to avoid the reality of their present lives. Jim, the gentleman caller Tom brings home to dinner, was the high school hero that everyone expected would do great things. However, as Tom says, "Jim apparently ran into more interference after his graduation from Soldan. His speed had definitely slowed. Six years after he left high school he was holding a job that wasn't much better than mine" (p. 61). Disturbed about his lack of success in the world, Jim enrolls in night school courses in public speaking and radio engineering and prepares to escape working at the warehouse by getting a job in television. He tells Laura, "I wish to be ready to go up right along with it. Therefore I'm planning to get in on the ground floor. In fact I've already made the right connections and all that remains is for the industry itself to get under way!" (p. 104).

The Paradise Dance Hall is located across the alley from the Wingfield apartment. In describing one spring evening Tom says, "Then the orchestra played a waltz or a tango, something that had a slow and sensuous rhythm. Couples would come outside, to the relative privacy of the alley. You could see them kissing behind ash-pits and telephone poles. This was the compensation for lives that passed like mine,

without any change or adventure" (pp. 46-47). The implication is that the Hall is a place where people can escape their commonplace, adventureless lives and indulge in a more exciting world. Tom then speaks of some of the changes that were happening in other countries and says of America, "But here there was only hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, bars, and movies, and sex that hung in the gloom like a chandelier and flooded the world with brief, deceptive rainbows" (p. 47). This statement presents a picture of the several ways people had of deluding themselves with sensual pleasures during the years of the depression in their attempts to forget the hardships of that time.

The dramatic works of Tennessee Williams usually contain a great deal of symbolism. Williams himself explains, "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. . . . 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."¹⁵ A few of the symbols of escape in The Glass Menagerie have already been mentioned. The phonograph records and glass menagerie, for example, represent escape for Laura Wingfield. However, other characters in the play also have certain things associated with their behavior as escapists. When Tom comes home at 5:00 a.m. after a night of movie-going, he tells Laura about Malvolio the Magician who headlined a stage show at the theater. Malvolio performed

¹⁵ Williams, "On the 'Camino Real,'" Sec. 2, p. 3.

several tricks, Tom says, "But the wonderfulest trick of all was the coffin trick. We nailed him into a coffin and he got out of the coffin without removing one nail. . . . There is a trick that would come in handy for me--get me out of this 2 by 4 situation!" (p. 32). Tom wishes he could escape from his present circumstances at the warehouse and in the apartment as easily as the magician escaped from the nailed-up coffin. The trick, then, is a symbol of this desire for freedom. Tom's father who fled from his family sixteen years before the play opens is also symbolic of escape. It is his experience which Tom seeks to duplicate when he runs away to join the Merchant Marine. Austell notes that Jim O'Connor is a symbol of escape to both Tom and his mother. The break that Jim is preparing to make from the present pattern of his life at the warehouse represents for Tom his own longing to change his life by making a break from his family. From Amanda's point of view, Jim represents an opportunity for her to relive her memories of her own gentlemen callers as he, she hopes, becomes Laura's suitor.¹⁶

Part of Amanda's preparations for Jim's arrival as a dinner guest include making improvements in the physical appearance of the apartment. Williams describes some of those changes by saying, "The new floor lamp with its rose-silk shade is in place, a colored paper lantern conceals the broken light fixture in the ceiling" (p. 62). If this broken fixture is seen as representing the harsh truth or reality of

¹⁶ Austell, What's In A Play?, p. 108.

the Wingfields' life, then the colored lantern which hides the fixture from sight can be considered symbolic of all the methods used by each member of the family to avoid facing up to reality. Also, as Tischler notes in a discussion of Battle of Angels, one of Williams' more frequently used symbols of the softening of truth is light, usually from Japanese lanterns, which produces a rosy glow.¹⁷ At the end of one of Amanda's recollections about her gentlemen callers in Blue Mountain, she stands in front of her husband's picture and admits that she married him instead of one of her many beaux. Then, Williams says of Amanda, "She switches on the rose-colored lamp" (p.66). It is as if the true nature of her marriage and her husband's later act of desertion were too painful for her to bear thinking about any longer. Turning on the lamp is a bit of symbolic action representing her need to escape from reality by relying on illusions and pretenses instead of truth. In addition to paying attention to the appearance of the apartment, Amanda buys a new dress for Laura and arranges her daughter's hair in a more attractive way. The "Gay Deceivers" she uses to enhance Laura's figure are indicative of her own tendency to elude reality through the use of deception, lies, and fantasy. The clothes that Amanda herself puts on for Jim's visit, especially the dress that she last wore as a young girl many years before, are also symbols of escape. They represent the way she tries to avoid her present situation by living in her memories of the past.

¹⁷ Tischler, Tennessee Williams, p. 80.

The fire-escape is a significant symbol for many people in The Glass Menagerie. In describing the setting of the play Williams says, "The apartment faces an alley and is entered by a fire-escape, a structure whose name is a touch of accidental poetic truth, for all of these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation" (p. 3). It is by means of this appropriately named stairway that both Mr. Wingfield and Tom flee from their places of responsibility within the family and embark upon new lives. For Jim, of course, it is his avenue of escape from the Wingfield apartment after his disastrous experience as Laura's gentleman caller. At one point in the play Amanda comes out onto the fire-escape and, according to Williams' description, "She spreads a newspaper on a step and sits down, gracefully and demurely as if she were settling into a swing on a Mississippi veranda" (p. 47). This action symbolizes her continuing desire to avoid her present circumstances and play the role of a Southern belle. Austell makes other observations about the symbolism of fire-escapes in The Glass Menagerie. For example, Laura's inability to cope with the real world outside the Wingfield apartment is indicated when she slips and falls on the fire-escape while leaving to run a simple errand. Also, for the people living in apartments near the Wingfield family, fire-escapes symbolize the chance they have to avoid frustration and boredom at home by seeking adventure elsewhere.¹⁸

¹⁸ Austell, What's In A Play?, pp. 108, 116.

The Glass Menagerie is a play set realistically in a St. Louis tenement during the depression years of the 1930's. The drama contains excellent examples of people who, for various reasons, are so unhappy with their lives and their surroundings that they employ escapism as a possible solution for their problems. Amanda avoids thinking about her life in the present and the unpleasant prospects of her life in the future by retreating into her past. Laura escapes from her disappointing past, present, and future by living in the timeless world of her glass menagerie. Mr. Wingfield, Tom, and Jim O'Connor elude their dissatisfaction with what the present is and what the future could be by trying to create new futures for themselves. Only Mr. Wingfield's flight can be called a complete success. However, he achieves it by giving up his friends and family and exiling himself from his home. The other three Wingfields who persist in their escapist activities seem to gain only further unhappiness. For them, escapism is disappointingly futile. The actions of these characters are typical of the escapist behavior to be found in Williams' later full-length dramas.

IV. A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

A Streetcar Named Desire was Tennessee Williams' next major success on the Broadway stage after The Glass Menagerie. It opened at the Barrymore Theater in New York on December 3, 1947,¹ and did not close until two years later after eight hundred and fifty-five performances.² Among the honors the play earned for Williams were his second New York Critics' Circle Award (his first had been for The Glass Menagerie) and the Pulitzer Prize.³ As in the case of The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire is set realistically in the slum section of a large American city. It conveys a similar message about the often futile nature of man's attempts to escape from the unpleasant circumstances of his surroundings into some better world. Streetcar also resembles Menagerie in the way in which much of the action of the play is precipitated by the escapist activities of a character who never appears in person on the stage.

Allan Grey married Blanche DuBois when she was just sixteen years old. Although Blanche is the primary escapist in A Streetcar Named Desire, Allan is significant since his suicide creates feelings in

¹ Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire, Signet Books (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1947), p. 11.

² Goodman, Drama on Stage, p. 291.

³ Tischler, Tennessee Williams, p. 146.

Blanche which contribute to her dependence upon escapism and thus to her eventual downfall. Allan's marriage and death occur several years prior to Blanche's arrival in New Orleans at the home of her married sister Stella at the beginning of the play. For this reason, one has to rely on Blanche's reminiscences for information about her husband. In speaking of Allan, Blanche repeatedly refers to him as a "boy" instead of a "man." Her choice of words could either apply figuratively to his basic immaturity or literally to his young age. As she tells Harold Mitchell, a poker-playing friend of her brother-in-law Stanley Kowalski, "He [Allan] was a boy, just a boy, when I was a very young girl. . . . There was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's, although he wasn't the least bit effeminate looking--still--that thing was there."⁴ Unfortunately for Allan and Blanche, two events occur which destroy any chance of their having a successful marriage: Allan commits a homosexual act with an older man and Blanche discovers the two of them together in a room she thought was unoccupied. Blanche says that this older man had been her husband's friend "for years," (p. 114) and thus implies that Allan had been a homosexual for some time.

Shortly after Blanche's discovery of his perversion, Allan kills himself with a revolver. To Jones, this suicide is a crucial experience which shocks Blanche into a fear of reality that persists throughout

⁴ Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire (New York: New Directions, 1947), p. 114. All further quotations from this edition will be indicated parenthetically.

her life.⁵ Blanche describes her part in the tragedy by telling Mitch, "We danced the Varsouviana! Suddenly in the middle of the dance the boy I had married broke away from me and ran out of the casino. A few moments later--a shot! . . . It was because--on the dance-floor--unable to stop myself--I'd suddenly said--'I saw! I know! You disgust me . . .'" (p. 115). Allan escapes initially from the pain and anguish which Blanche's words cause him to feel by fleeing from the dance-floor. Then, after arriving at the edge of the lake, he makes his escape complete by taking his own life. He had hoped to receive sympathy and understanding from his wife. However, she offers only condemnation. Blanche obviously feels responsible for her husband's death. She admits her failure to aid him and says, "He came to me for help. I didn't know that. I didn't find out anything till after our marriage. . . . He was in the quicksands and clutching at me--but I wasn't holding him out, I was slipping in with him!" (p. 114). The guilt which Blanche feels for having caused the shooting haunts her for the rest of her life. Trying to escape from this guilt as well as from her memories of the horrifying, violent manner of Allan's death contributes to the pattern of flight which ultimately brings Blanche to Stella's apartment in New Orleans.

Another aspect of the influence which Allan's escape through suicide has on Blanche's own escapist tendencies can be found in examining the reasons behind Blanche's promiscuity. In her words, "After the

⁵ Jones, "Williams' Early Heroines," p. 217.

death of Allan--intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with" (p. 146). Blanche engages in sexual activities with various men in order to escape the loneliness which overwhelms her after her husband's demise. As she tells Stella soon after her arrival, "I want to be near you, got to be with somebody, I can't be alone!" (p. 17). Mitchell Leaska notes that in Williams' characterization of Blanche the playwright is almost exclusively concerned with her attempts to escape from the overwhelming anxiety caused by her extreme loneliness and inability to feel genuine love for another person.⁶ Blanche's sexuality continues to be evident during her stay with the Kowalskis. She is curious about Stanley at first and asks her sister, "Will Stanley like me, or will I be just a visiting in-law, Stella?" (p.17). She flirts with him until he admits, "If I didn't know that you was my wife's sister I'd get ideas about you!" (p. 41). While the men are playing poker in the front room, Blanche stands partially undressed in the bedroom in a patch of light produced by a gap in the curtains until Stella notices and has her move. After Stella leaves, however, in the words of Williams' stage directions, "Blanche moves back into the streak of light. She raises her arms and stretches, as she moves indolently back to the chair" (p. 54). One evening when she is alone in the flat, she makes advances to a young man collecting money for a newspaper. After kissing him she says, "Now run along, now, quickly! It would be nice to keep you, but I've got to be good--and

⁶ Mitchell A. Leaska, The Voice of Tragedy (New York: Robert Speller & Sons, Publishers, Inc., 1963), p. 280.

keep my hands off children" (p. 99). Blanche and Mitch have the following conversation one night when they return from a date:

BLANCHE: . . . Je suis la Dame aux Camellias! Vous êtes--
Armand! Understand French?

MITCH [heavily]: Naw. Naw, I--

BLANCHE: Voulez-vous couchez avec moi ce soir? Vous
ne comprenez pas? Ah, quelle dommage!--I
mean it's a damned good thing. (p. 104)

She is teasing him, but he does not realize it. Thus Allan's escape is significant not only for what it reveals about his own character but also for what it causes Blanche to do.

Blanche's attempts to escape by means of flight and sex from the unpleasantness of the guilt and loneliness which result from Allan's death effectively provide the seeds for many of her later actions in Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire. There are, of course, other reasons for her behavior as an escapist which are part of her life before she arrives in New Orleans. Belle Reve is the name of the DuBois family plantation. At one time it had evidently been quite large and prosperous. However, as Blanche tells Stanley, "There are thousands of papers, stretching back over hundreds of years, affecting Belle Reve, as piece by piece, our improvident grandfathers and father and uncles and brothers exchanged the land for their epic fornications. . . . The four-letter word deprived us of our plantation, till finally all that was left--and Stella can verify that!--was the house itself and about twenty acres of ground, including a graveyard, to which now all but Stella and I have retreated" (p. 44). Blanche is upset not only by the diminishing land area of Belle Reve but also by its declining population. She complains to Stella, "I, I, I took the blows in my

face and my body! All of those deaths! The long parade to the graveyard! Father, mother! Margaret, that dreadful way! . . . And old Cousin Jessie's right after Margaret's, hers! Why, the Grim Reaper had put up his tent on our doorstep! (pp. 21-22). As a result of both her young husband's violent suicide and her relatives' fatal illnesses, the figure of death becomes very real and terrifying to Blanche. In order to escape death herself, she flees to Laurel after finally losing ownership of Belle Reve and becomes notorious for her promiscuity. She lives in the Flamingo Hotel and teaches English in the high school. She explains her actions by saying, "Death. . . . The opposite is desire" (pp. 148-49). As Jones notes, the idea that desire is a means of escaping and forgetting death is constant in Williams' dramatic works.⁷ In addition, then, to providing an escape from the loneliness which she feels after each departure of a member of her family from Belle Reve, sexual activities with a variety of men in Laurel enable Blanche, for a while at least, to feel vital and alive. Eventually this behavior causes authorities in Laurel to censure her, and Blanche flees to Stella's apartment in New Orleans. As Stanley tells Stella, "That's why she's here this summer, visiting royalty, putting on all this act--because she's practically told by the mayor to get out of town! . . . They kicked her out of that high school before the spring term ended--and I hate to tell you the reason that step was taken! A seventeen-year-old boy--she'd gotten mixed up

⁷ Jones, "Williams' Early Heroines," p. 217.

with!" (pp. 121-22). Blanche tries to elude the consequences of her life in Laurel by running away.

During her stay in New Orleans, Blanche spends a great deal of time trying to escape having the details of her past discovered by those around her. Telling lies becomes a major part of her behavior as an escapist. Instead of admitting the real reason behind her departure from her teaching job before the end of the semester, she lies and tells Stella, "I was so exhausted. . . . I was on the verge of--lunacy, almost! So Mr. Graves--Mr. Graves is the high school superintendent--he suggested I take a leave of absence" (p. 14). She brings up the matter herself and volunteers the answer she wants Stella to hear before Stella can ask the question. In this way she hopes to close the subject and thus avoid having Stella find out the truth later on. When Mitch asks her about visiting Stella and Stanley, Blanche does not tell him that she has come to them desperately seeking a place to hide from those in Laurel who would discredit her. She says only, "Stella hasn't been so well lately, and I came down to help her for a while. She's very run down" (p. 60). The truth is that Stella is in good health and Blanche does not even know enough about her sister's present condition to know that she is pregnant. The first step in Stanley's discovery of the facts about Blanche in Laurel occurs when he asks her about a man named Shaw at the Flamingo Hotel. However, since he does not yet have the complete story, he allows Blanche's statement that she does not know Shaw and has never been in the Flamingo Hotel to go unchallenged. Immediately afterward Blanche

initiates a discussion of her past in Laurel with Stella in an attempt to give her the information she wants her to hear before Stanley can return and inflict her with the truth.

BLANCHE: Honey, there was--a good deal of talk in Laurel.

STELLA: About you, Blanche?

BLANCHE: I wasn't so good the last two years or so, after Belle Reve had started to slip through my fingers.

STELLA: All of us do things we--

BLANCHE: I never was hard or self-sufficient enough.
(pp. 91-92)

Another part of her past which Blanche is defensive about concerns her marriage to Allan Grey. When Stanley asks what happened to Allan, Blanche can only reply, "The boy--the boy died. . . . I'm afraid I'm--going to be sick!" (p. 28). Since she still feels guilty for having caused his death, the thought of what happened makes her so physically ill that she cannot answer Stanley any further. It is only later in the play in an attempt to elicit sympathy and a declaration of love from Mitch that Blanche is able to tell someone the details of her husband's suicide.

Blanche does not confine her lying merely to the events of her past life. Throughout A Streetcar Named Desire she lies about her age, her drinking habits, and her plans for the future. Williams' stage directions state clearly that Stella is about twenty-five years old and Blanche, her sister, is about five years older. However, when Blanche first meets Mitch she tells him, "Yes, Stella is my precious little sister. I call her little in spite of the fact she's somewhat older than I. Just slightly. Less than a year" (p. 60). Stella is aware of Blanche's sensitivity about her age and only puts twenty-five

candles on her sister's birthday cake. Then during her birthday party Blanche tells Stanley, "I wasn't expecting any [presents], I--I don't know why Stella wants to observe my birthday! I'd much rather forget it--when you--reach twenty-seven! Well--age is a subject that you'd prefer to--ignore!" (p. 135). Blanche's concern about her age is more than just a simple matter of feminine vanity. Lying about how old she is is part of her scheme to get Mitch to marry her. If she can accomplish this, then she can escape the loneliness which plagues her and find the security and protection for which she longs. Blanche makes all this clear in the following dialogue with Stella:

STELLA: Why are you sensitive about your age?

BLANCHE: . . . I want to deceive him enough to make him--
want me . . .

STELLA: Blanche, do you want him?

BLANCHE: I want to rest! I want to breathe quietly again!
Yes--I want Mitch . . . very badly! Just think!
If it happens! I can leave here and not be anyone's
problem . . . (p. 95)

"I thanked God for you," Blanche later tells Mitch, "because you seemed to be gentle--a cleft in the rock of the world that I could hide in!" (p. 147). She tries to rationalize her behavior by saying, "I know I fib a good deal. After all, a woman's charm is fifty per cent illusion" (p. 41). Unfortunately, Blanche's plan to marry Mitch is unsuccessful. After Stanley tells him the whole story of her scarlet past, Mitch decides that Blanche is not fit to be his wife. When he upbraids her for having lied to him, she can only protest, "Never inside, I didn't lie in my heart . . ." (p. 147).

In addition to trying to escape the truth about her age, Blanche

also attempts to deny the reality of her drinking habits. This is an interesting situation since drinking itself is another one of Blanche's escape mechanisms. For example, Scene Nine in A Streetcar Named Desire begins with the following description: "On the table beside [the] chair is a bottle of liquor and a glass. The rapid, feverish polka tune, the 'Varsouviana,' is heard. The music is in her [Blanche's] mind; she is drinking to escape it and the sense of disaster closing in on her" (p. 139). The music is significant because it is the same polka which was playing when Allan Grey shot himself. Thus by drinking to avoid hearing the Varsouviana, Blanche is actually trying to forget Allan's suicide and the guilty feelings she has about having caused it. The disaster which is mentioned refers in part to Stanley's announcement in the previous Scene that he has purchased a bus ticket for Blanche to use to return to Laurel. She knows only too well that she cannot go back to that city. Her sole chance for survival in the world lies in the possibility of marrying Mitch. Since he lives in New Orleans, she must stay where she is and give him the opportunity to court her. However, another facet of the atmosphere of disaster which haunts Blanche is her fear that Mitch did not come to her birthday party because Stanley might have told him about her notorious past. At the beginning of the next Scene after a violent confrontation with Mitch in which he says he no longer wants to marry her, Blanche is again pictured as drinking heavily. A reliance upon liquor in these times of stress in order to escape an awareness of things which trouble her seems to be a well-established pattern in Blanche's life. She probably drank earlier when

the painful memories of Allan's suicide were even fresher, and also when she was disturbed by the succession of deaths at Belle Reve. Indeed, several of Blanche's actions and statements concerning liquor at Stella's house seem as though they were made by an alcoholic. Whether or not Blanche actually becomes an alcoholic, however, an examination of the lies she tells and rationalizations she uses to escape admitting the extent of her drinking is necessary for a complete study of the theme of escapism in A Streetcar Named Desire.

Blanche's lies about her consumption of liquor are found throughout the play. Practically the first thing she does after arriving at Stella's is take a drink. In Williams' words, "Suddenly she notices something in a half opened closet. She springs up and crosses to it, and removes a whiskey bottle. She pours a half tumbler of whiskey and tosses it down. She carefully replaces the bottle and washes out the tumbler at the sink. Then she resumes her seat in front of the table" (p. 10). But when Stella enters the flat moments later, Blanche tells her, "Open your pretty mouth and talk while I look around for some liquor! I know you must have some liquor on the place! Where could it be, I wonder? Oh, I spy, I spy!" (p. 11). Stella, Stanley, and Mitch are all surprised by the frequency with which Blanche turns to the bottle. Instead of simply admitting that she likes to drink a lot, Blanche continually tries to present herself as one unaccustomed to too much liquor. After having already had two drinks, one alone and one with Stella, Blanche refuses her sister's offer of another by saying that one drink is her limit. Shortly thereafter she changes

her mind and tells Stella, "I am going to take just one little tiny nip more, sort of to put the stopper on, so to speak" (p. 15). The basic excuse which Blanche gives Stella for having anything to drink at all is that liquor helps cool her off and calm her down when she is hot, tired, and nervous. When Stanley first meets Blanche and offers her a drink, however, she replies falsely that she rarely touches liquor. Blanche's initial encounter with Mitch occurs when she and Stella return to the flat during a poker game. After slurring her words in a conversation with him, Blanche protests, "My tongue is a little--thick! You boys are responsible for it. The show let out at eleven and we couldn't come home on account of the poker game so we had to go somewhere and drink. I'm not accustomed to having more than one drink. Two is the limit--and three! [She laughs] Tonight I had three" (p. 59). The following dialogue between Blanche and Mitch occurs when they enter Stella's house late one evening after a date:

BLANCHE [remaining in the first room] : The other room's more comfortable--go on in. This crashing around in the dark is my search for some liquor.

MITCH: You want a drink?

BLANCHE: I want you to have a drink! (pp. 103-104)

When the bottle is found, however, it is Blanche who does most of the drinking. On another occasion Mitch makes an unexpected call while Stella and Stanley are not at home. Blanche, who has been drinking a great deal, hides the bottle before she lets Mitch in and then pretends suddenly to find it again after a short search.

The lies which Blanche tells about her plans for the future are composed of fantasy relationships between herself and Harold Mitchell

or Shep Huntleigh. An urgent desire to escape from loneliness is probably the key to Blanche's illusions about these two men. She creates illusions because they enable her to escape mentally from the harsh world around her into the more pleasant world of her imagination. Actually, the future which Blanche hopes to share with Mitch in marriage almost does become a new reality for them both. They go out on dates and laugh together and kiss like a typical courting couple. They each sympathize with the other's tale of a lost love. Unfortunately, their idyll ends when Mitch hears the truth about Blanche's sordid past in Laurel from his friend Stanley. Mitch walks out on Blanche, tells her he no longer wants to marry her, and leaves her alone to face a hostile world. At one point in the play, the future which Blanche imagines for herself with Shep also includes her sister Stella. Shep, according to Blanche, was one of her college beaux. He is now a wealthy married man living in Dallas. Blanche plans to ask him for financial help so that she and Stella can open some kind of shop. In this way they can escape a life with Stanley which Blanche considers too degrading for members of the DuBois family to tolerate. After an unsuccessful attempt to contact Shep by telegraph, however, the plan, a flimsy creation of Blanche's desperate dissatisfaction with her present circumstances, is not mentioned again.

Of somewhat longer duration is Blanche's concern with the fantasy about herself and Shep which she initiates in Scene Ten. The previous Scene contains the confrontation between Mitch and Blanche in which he destroys all the dreams she had fostered about their getting married.

Blanche reacts to Mitch's departure by creating a tale in which she is once again the desirable, much-sought-after female. When Stanley comes home in the evening after having left Stella in the hospital to have their baby, he and Blanche have the following conversation:

BLANCHE: I received a telegram from an old admirer of mine.

STANLEY: Anything good?

BLANCHE: I think so. An invitation.

STANLEY: What to? A fireman's ball?

BLANCHE [throwing back her head]: A cruise of the Caribbean on a yacht! (pp. 152-53)

Stanley immediately suspects that Blanche is lying and tries to trap her into making contradictory statements. She responds, Williams says, by "Improvising feverishly" (p. 156) and telling Stanley, "What he [Shep] wants is my companionship. Having great wealth sometimes makes people lonely! A cultivated woman, a woman of intelligence and breeding, can enrich a man's life--immeasurably! I have those things to offer" (p. 156). John Von Szeliski states that whenever a sensitive protagonist suffers disorientation as a result of being pitted against insensitive people in the world, the only adjustment he can make is an attempt to preserve the illusions which are valuable to him by role-playing.⁸ This is certainly what Blanche resorts to at this desperate time in her life. Elia Kazan explains that the image of herself which Blanche wants to maintain must ultimately be couched in fantasy since there is no way it can be accomplished in the real world.⁹ Finally,

⁸ John Von Szeliski, "Tennessee Williams and the Tragedy of Sensitivity," Western Humanities Review, 20 (1966), 203.

⁹ Elia Kazan, "Notebook for A Streetcar Named Desire," in The Passionate Playgoer, ed. George Oppenheimer (New York: The Viking Press, 1962), p. 344.

Stanley can bear no more of the irritating affectations and pretensions which Blanche has continually inflicted upon him during the play. He tells her she is a liar and rapes her. Thus, Blanche's last connection with reality is severed. This attack terminates the contest which has been going on between Stanley and his sister-in-law. Alvin Kernan accurately describes it as the conflict between Kowalski's realistic view of life and Blanche's unrealistic view.¹⁰ Blanche's shocked mind refuses to accept what has actually happened to her and clings instead to a belief in Shep's illusory invitation to a summer cruise. When a neighbor asks Stella what she told Blanche about the asylum she is being committed to, she replies, "I--just told her that--we'd made arrangements for her to rest in the country. She's got it mixed in her mind with Shep Huntleigh" (pp. 164-65). Fantasy becomes the basis of insanity and Blanche escapes, perhaps permanently, from the world of Stanley Kowalski. Blanche herself presents one of the most accurate assessments of her character and destiny when she tells Mitch, "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!" (p. 145). Unfortunately for her, she ultimately is damned to life in an institution.

Stella DuBois Kowalski is another character in A Streetcar Named Desire who behaves as an escapist. Like her sister Blanche, although

¹⁰ Alvin B. Kernan, "Truth and Dramatic Mode in the Modern Theater: Chekhov, Pirandello, and Williams," Modern Drama, 1 (1958), 111.

to a somewhat lesser degree, Stella employs flight, sexual activity, and deliberate denials of the truth in her efforts to elude unpleasant realities and create a better world for herself. Stella's departure from Belle Reve precedes Blanche's and, as the following dialogue indicates, causes her to be criticized by Blanche when the two of them are reunited:

BLANCHE: Well, Stella-you're going to reproach me, I know that you're bound to reproach me--but before you do--take into consideration--you left! I stayed and struggled! You came to New Orleans and looked out for yourself! I stayed at Belle Reve and tried to hold it together! I'm not meaning this in any reproachful way, but all the burden descended on my shoulders.

STELLA: The best I could do was make my own living, Blanche. [Blanche begins to shake again with intensity.]

BLANCHE: I know, I know. But you are the one that abandoned Belle Reve, not I! I stayed and fought for it, bled for it, almost died for it! (p. 20)

Stella came to New Orleans the summer that their father died while Blanche did not flee until years later after a series of deaths had removed all the other members of the family. As Blanche says, "You just came home in time for the funerals, Stella. And funerals are pretty compared to deaths" (p. 21). Stella's decision to leave Belle Reve in order to make her living in the world implies a desire to elude influences at home which would have kept her from living her own life in her own way. When she marries Stanley Kowalski she chooses an existence which is quite different from her plantation heritage.

The Kowalskis' two-room flat in New Orleans is little more than a slum. Stanley himself is a loud, crude hedonist. The tie which binds Stella to her husband, however, at the same time that it blinds her to

some of his more unpleasant character traits and their unspectacular living conditions is Stanley's skill at love-making. During their intimacies she is able to escape an awareness of all that is disagreeable about her husband and her home. Stanley fulfills her and she is satisfied being his wife and the mother of his child. Her relationship with him and the adjustment she has made to it are all that keep her from the degeneration and destruction that Blanche undergoes. Stella avoids Blanche's fate, according to Jones, because she completely accepts physical love with her husband.¹¹ Blanche, however, in the opinion of George Kernodle, is much too sensitive to make the kind of adjustment her sister makes to life on an animal level.¹² Stanley expresses Stella's situation quite well when he tells her, "When we first met, me and you, you thought I was common. How right you was, baby. I was common as dirt. You showed me the snapshot of the place with the columns. I pulled you down off them columns and how you loved it, having them colored lights going!" (p. 137). Stella reveals the depth of her dependence upon him when she says, "I can hardly stand it when he is away for a night . . ." (p. 19) and "When he's away for a week I nearly go wild!" (p. 19). When Blanche comes to visit, she is appalled by both Stanley's bestiality and the run-down condition of the flat. Her criticisms prompt Stella to explain, "But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark--that sort of make everything

¹¹ Jones, "Williams' Early Heroines," p. 215.

¹² George R. Kernodle, "Time-Frightened Playwrights," American Scholar, 18 (1949), 448.

else seem--unimportant" (p. 81). Indeed, this explanation contains one of the major clues to understanding Stella's personality.

Unlike Blanche, Stella is never portrayed by Williams as what might be termed a compulsive liar. However, there are times when she consciously tries to escape the truth of some situation which threatens her. For example, when Stanley tries to tell Stella the facts about her sister's promiscuous behavior in Laurel, she protests, "I don't want to hear any more!" (p. 122). After Stanley has finished his description of Blanche's activities, Stella tells him, "I don't believe all of those stories and I think your supply-man was mean and rotten to tell them" (p. 124). She is simply not prepared to accept these revelations. Earlier in the play Stella attempts to explain Blanche's attitude toward their flat by telling Stanley, "She wasn't expecting to find us in such a small place. You see I'd tried to gloss things over a little in my letters" (p. 31). Evidently she wanted to escape being reproached by Blanche for not living in a better home in a more affluent neighborhood. The most significant evasion of the truth which Stella makes concerns Stanley's attack on Blanche. She reacts to the rape by saying, "I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley" (p. 165). Thus she chooses to continue existing with her husband and enjoying the nights with colored lights going by denying the reality of what happened to her sister. She is encouraged to make this decision by a neighbor who pragmatically advises, "Don't ever believe it. Life has got to go on. No matter what happens, you've got to keep on going" (p. 166). Rather than suffer the destruction of

her marriage, Stella commits Blanche to an asylum. As Kazan notes, the "spine" or key to Stella's character is her realization that she must hang onto Stanley no matter what happens.¹³ Ultimately, the price she pays for keeping Stanley is the life of her sister.

The final escapist in A Streetcar Named Desire to be considered here is Blanche's suitor, Harold Mitchell. A desire to escape loneliness is the reason he courts Blanche. After explaining to his poker-playing friends that his mother is ill, Mitch says, "You all are married. But I'll be alone when she goes" (p. 48). This need for companionship is shared by Blanche and forms the basis for their relationship. She tells him, "I think you have a great capacity for devotion. You will be lonely when she passes on, won't you? . . . I understand what that is" (p. 113). Durant DaPonte observes that Mitch, like Blanche, is unable to face reality.¹⁴ This is an interesting statement since the truth which Mitch tries to escape from is the real nature of Blanche's life. He confronts her one evening after hearing about her scandalous activities in Laurel from Stanley and says, "I don't mind you being older than what I thought. But all the rest of it--Christ! That pitch about your ideals being so old-fashioned and all the malarkey that you've dished out all summer. Oh, I knew you weren't sixteen any more. But I was a fool enough to believe you was straight" (p. 145).

¹³ Kazan, "Notebook for Streetcar," p. 349.

¹⁴ Durant DaPonte, "Tennessee Williams' Gallery of Feminine Characters," Tennessee Studies in Literature, 10 (1965), 16.

Even after Blanche admits that what he was told was true, tries to explain why she acted in that manner, and re-emphasizes how much she needs him if she is to survive, Mitch will not forgive her. He calls her a liar and leaves. His final opinion of Blanche is, "You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother" (p. 150). Since he cannot cope with what Blanche has done, he decides to avoid all further involvements with her.

A Streetcar Named Desire contains both symbols and episodes of symbolic action which relate to the activities of the various escapists in the play. The name of the DuBois family plantation, Belle Reve, translates literally from French to mean "beautiful dream" even though the masculine noun is modified by an adjective in the feminine form. Jones states that the name and its inconsistent grammatical construction symbolizes the flight from reality which is attempted by members of the DuBois family.¹⁵ The beautiful dreams which Stella and Blanche have when they escape from the plantation soon prove to be inconsistent with the lives which they live in the real world. Nelson feels that Stella's sleeping habits are significant. He implies that sleep represents the way in which she shuts her eyes to the realization that by marrying Stanley she has given up her dreams of what her life might have been.¹⁶ The Varsouviana is the name of the polka music Blanche and Allan Grey were dancing to when he fled from her and took his life. Winifred Dusenbury observes that the tune is heard symbolically in the play

¹⁵ Jones, "Williams' Early Heroines," p. 215.

¹⁶ Nelson, Tennessee Williams, p. 147.

whenever Blanche is losing contact with reality.¹⁷ For example, it plays throughout Scene Eleven during her fantasies about Shep Huntleigh. Her mind retreats to these illusions rather than accept the actuality of Stanley's attack. Dusenbury further notes that the bathroom in the Kowalski's apartment, Blanche's only island of refuge and retreat, is symbolic as the place which separates her from the life of Stella and Stanley.¹⁸ Blanche frequently takes long, hot baths which she says are good for her nerves. Of more importance is the fact that she can hide in the bathroom from the outside world and avoid Stanley's questions about her past in Laurel. One of the most ironic scenes in the play occurs when Blanche is in the bathroom singing "It's Only a Paper Moon" and Stanley is outside telling Stella all about her sister's promiscuity. As Henry Popkin correctly notes, the song is an interesting symbolic effect which expresses the efforts Blanche makes to foster illusions about herself.¹⁹ The song begins, "Say, it's only a paper moon, Sailing over a cardboard sea--But it wouldn't be make-believe If you believed in me!" (p. 120). Blanche's unrealistic world of cardboard oceans and paper moons, in which she is simply a widowed schoolteacher visiting her married sister, does not endure because her brother-in-law does not believe in her. He exposes her scarlet past

¹⁷ Winifred L. Dusenbury, The Theme of Loneliness in Modern American Drama (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960), p. 142.

¹⁸ Dusenbury, Loneliness in Modern Drama, p. 141.

¹⁹ Henry Popkin, "The Plays of Tennessee Williams," Tulane Drama Review, 4, No. 3 (1960), 58-59.

to both her sister and the man she hopes will someday marry her.

Probably the most significant symbol of escape in A Streetcar Named Desire is the colored paper lantern which Blanche puts over the bare light bulb in the Kowalski's apartment. Tischler's statement about lanterns that produce a rosy glow being one of Williams' traditional symbols for the softening of truth, an opinion mentioned previously in the chapter on The Glass Menagerie, also applies in this situation.²⁰ Blanche tries to avoid the strong light of the uncovered bulb since it might illuminate her features too clearly and reveal her true age. Her age and her appearance are two things about which she is most sensitive and defensive. Shortly after her arrival at Stella's, before she buys the lantern, Blanche admonishes her sister, "But don't you look at me, Stella, no, no, no, not till later, not till I've bathed and rested! And turn that over-light off! Turn that off! I won't be looked at in this merciless glare!" (p. 11). While Mitch is installing the lantern over the light bulb for her Blanche tells him, "I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action" (p. 60). Considering the nature of some of the things she did in Laurel, her words are just as much an attempt to cover up the truth of her past life as the lantern is an attempt to hide the harsh light of the bulb. Blanche never goes out with Mitch in the daytime, and at night only goes with him to places that are not well-lighted. One evening when they return from a date, she asks him not to turn the

²⁰ Tischler, Tennessee Williams, p. 80.

light in the flat on at all and uses a candle instead. To Jones, the candle is one of Williams' most obvious symbols of an escape from reality.²¹ In Scene Eight Blanche tells a story about a parrot who was tricked one day into believing it was night by having his cage covered with a cloth. To Callahan, the parrot represents Blanche in the way in which darkness is used to hide the truth.²² The paper lantern is torn off the light bulb by Mitch after Stanley tells him the facts about Blanche. He then gazes at her closely, realizes how old she must be, and repeats what Stanley has told him. Mitch's action with the lantern represents the destruction of all the illusions Blanche had been desperately trying to maintain about herself. When the truth is exposed, Mitch deserts her. At the end of the play, Blanche takes the torn lantern with her to the asylum. In this case it seems to represent the fantasies about Shep Huntleigh which are all her insane mind has left to comfort itself with.

For characters in A Streetcar Named Desire, escapism rarely provides a desirable solution for their problems. Allan Grey is able to elude completely the troubles that plague him during his life, but only by giving up his life. Blanche DuBois avoids the unpleasant aspects of existence in reality, but only by going insane. These two solutions, death and insanity, offer the characters destruction instead of a chance for a better life. Stella and Mitch do not seem to fare much better.

²¹ Jones, "Williams' Early Heroines," p. 216.

²² Callahan, "Williams' Two Worlds," p. 63.

Stella survives Blanche's intrusion and stays with Stanley, but it is questionable whether her attitude toward him will ever be totally as it was before Blanche's visit. There will surely be times when the guilt she feels for committing her sister to the asylum will cause her to blame Stanley for it as well and see him as the barbaric animal Blanche judged him to be. Mitch saves himself from any lasting relationship with a woman with an unsavory past when he deserts Blanche, but he may never find another woman to marry. Thus he may still be condemned to a life of loneliness after the death of his mother. The point, then, that Williams seems to be making in the play is basically the same one found in The Glass Menagerie. Escape, even when it can be accomplished, is often futile. If a character is not actually destroyed by his escapist activities, then he at least suffers some other type of unhappiness or disappointment which leaves him in a condition not much better than the one he was in originally.

V. CAMINO REAL

In Camino Real Tennessee Williams makes a departure from the more conventional type of dramatic form in which the majority of his plays are written. After a disastrous run in New York in 1953, the piece was rewritten extensively and put into production successfully off Broadway in 1960.¹ Unlike his earlier works including The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire and such later dramas as Sweet Bird of Youth and The Night of the Iguana, Camino Real is not set realistically at a definite time in a definite location and does not depend solely on Williams' skill in characterization for some of the more important personages in the cast. The play is a fantasy in which many bizarre events occur and several of the characters are adapted directly from history, literature, tradition, and legend. What is significant about Camino Real as far as a study of the theme of escapism in Williams' plays is concerned is that it depicts characters who are able to escape completely from their present circumstances without suffering any form of destruction or impairment. Not all of the people in the play, of course, desire escape. Neither do all of those who wish to avoid life on the Camino Real find themselves able to do so. However, the escape which is accomplished by Lord Byron, Don Quixote, and Kilroy is made possible by both the nature of the unrealistic world described in the play and

¹ Tischler, Tennessee Williams, pp. 194-95.

the nature of the three escapists themselves.

The action of Camino Real takes place at no particular time in the plaza of an unidentified city in an unspecified Latin American country. In his stage directions all Williams says about the location of the plaza is, "It belongs to a tropical seaport that bears a confusing, but somehow harmonious, resemblance to such widely scattered ports as Tangiers, Havana, Vera Cruz, Casablanca, Shanghai, New Orleans."² The fountain in the center of the plaza is flanked on one side by the luxurious Siete Mares Hotel and on the other side by the flophouse and pawn shop on Skid Row. In the background is an archway which leads to the desolate Terra Incognita and the distant mountains. The many characters in the play can be divided into two groups: residents and transients. The residents are those who inhabit the plaza on a full-time basis and operate its various establishments. Several of them perform actions and have names which supply an audience with connotations which can be used to round out their characterizations. For example, the cynical, rotund Mr. Gutman is the proprietor of the opulent Siete Mares Hotel. A.Ratt is the manager of the flea-bag hotel Ritz Men Only on the other side of the square. Two Streetcleaners in blood-stained white coats haul the bodies of their victims away in their garbage can. Other residents include the Loan Shark, La Madrecita De Los Perdidos and her son, two police officers, an old prostitute named Rosita, the Gypsy and her daughter Esmeralda, and various street vendors. For the most part, these people are content

² Tennessee Williams, Camino Real (New York: New Directions, 1953), p. 1. All further quotations from this edition will be indicated parenthetically.

to live in the plaza and prey on the unfortunate travelers who pass through the town. Only Esmeralda makes any attempt to flee from her surroundings. Williams describes her efforts in this way: "Esmeralda, barefooted, wearing only a slip, bursts out of the Gypsy's establishment like an animal broken out of a cage. . . . Abdullah catches sight of her, seizes her wrist. . . . Esmeralda fights savagely. She nearly breaks loose, but Nursie and the Gypsy close upon her, too, and she is overwhelmed and dragged back, fighting all the way, toward the door from which she escaped" (pp. 51-52). Her flight is unsuccessful, and she even forgets that it happened after the Fiesta starts and the rising of the moon restores her virginity.

In contrast to this group of residents, every transient in the play tries to elude existence on the Camino Real. As Gutman observes, "this is a port of entry and departure. There are no permanent guests" (p. 73). Several of these guests, including Jacques Casanova, Marguerite Gautier, Lord Byron, Kilroy, and Don Quixote, are figures who were well-known to the public long before Williams incorporated them into his play. Tischler observes that by using these archetypes as characters Williams is able to take advantage of the wealth of impressions an audience would already have about them and let these allusions do much of the work of characterization for him.³ Regardless of their points of origin, whether they come to Camino Real from myth, history, or Williams' own mind, the common desire shared by all the transients in

³ Tischler, Tennessee Williams, p. 192.

the play is a wish to escape from the harsh, unrealistic world of the plaza and find another world in which to live. Gerald Weales states that flight and sex are the two means of escape used most frequently in Williams' dramas.⁴ This observation is certainly true with regard to Camino Real. Other escape mechanisms used by transients in the play, however, include clinging to illusions and trying to recapture some of the glory of their past lives. Gutman recognizes this tendency of others to seek comfort by reminiscing and says, "My guests are confused and exhausted but at this hour they pull themselves together, and drift downstairs on the wings of gin and the lift, they drift into the public rooms and exchange notes again on fashionable couturiers and custom tailors, restaurants, vintages of wine, hair-dressers" (p. 16).

Jacques Casanova is the legendary great lover. He appears in the play as "A tall, courtly figure, in his late middle years. . . . He bears his hawklike head with a sort of anxious pride on most occasions, a pride maintained under a steadily mounting pressure" (p. 8). Part of the pressure which is on Jacques is caused by the sad state of his financial affairs. Although he has no money, he has run up a large debt at the Siete Mares Hotel. His pride will not permit him either to live in any way other than the luxury to which he has become accustomed or to admit that he cannot pay his bills. Finally the

⁴ Gerald Weales, Tennessee Williams, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 53 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), pp. 30-31.

following confrontation occurs between Jacques and the owner of the hotel:

JACQUES [fiercely] : --Cognac!

[The Waiter whispers to Gutman. Gutman chuckles.]

GUTMAN: The Maître 'D' tells me that your credit has been discontinued in the restaurant and bar, he says that he has enough of your tabs to pave the terrace with!

JACQUES: What a piece of impertinence! I told the man that the letter that I'm expecting has been delayed in the mail. The postal service in this country is fantastically disorganized, and you know it! (p. 18)

Rather than accept the reality of his situation, Jacques creates the illusion of a delayed letter containing a remittance check. He deludes himself into believing that he will receive money in this way. As Gassner states, the last refuge which battered characters in Williams' plays usually have is self-delusion.⁵ When Jacques does actually receive a letter, he avoids opening it as long as possible. His nervous reaction to the delivery of the letter causes Gutman to say, "Your hand is paralyzed? . . . By what? Anxiety? Apprehension? . . . Put the letter in Signor Casanova's pocket so he can open it when he recovers the use of his digital extremities" (p. 56). That evening at dinner Jacques and Marguerite Gautier have the following conversation:

MARGUERITE: You haven't opened the letter!

JACQUES: I haven't had the nerve to! I've had so many unpleasant surprises that I've lost faith in my luck.

MARGUERITE: Give the letter to me. Let me open it for you.

JACQUES: Later, a little bit later, after the--wine . . . (p. 64)

Jacques knows already that the letter probably does not contain another

⁵ Gassner, "Tennessee Williams," p. 4.

check and thus wants to leave it unopened in order to escape having the truth of his destitution discovered by others. He has been warned by Cutman that he will have to move to the Ritz Men Only if a check does not arrive. Therefore, he also wants to evade the sense of desperation which he will feel when it is revealed that he will receive no more money. When he finally does open the letter late in the play and it is made public that his remittances have been discontinued, he is evicted from the Siete Mares Hotel.

Jacques' financial difficulties make life on the Camino Real so unpleasant for him that he longs to flee across the Terra Incognita. He never actually attempts the journey, however, because he is afraid of living without Marguerite Gautier. His pride will not let him admit this weakness to others. Thus when Kilroy asks if he is ready to accompany him on his flight, Jacques excuses himself by saying, "No, . . . I'm sweetly encumbered with a--lady . . ." (p. 45). It is only while talking with Marguerite herself that Jacques accepts the reality of his fear.

MARGUERITE: . . . You really don't want to leave here. You think you don't want to go because you're brave as an old hawk. But the truth of the matter--the real not the royal truth--is that you're terrified of the Terra Incognita outside that wall.

JACQUES: You've hit upon the truth. I'm terrified of the unknown country inside or outside this wall of any place on earth without you with me! (p. 71)

Because of this unwillingness to take advantage of his opportunities for flight, Jacques must be content with the escape he can find by occasionally retreating into the behavior of his younger days. After

an unsuccessful attempt to pawn a valuable case for as much money as he wanted, he tells the Loan Shark, "Why, I'd rather give it to a street beggar! This case is a Boucheron, I won it at faro at the summer palace, at Tsarskoe Selo in the winter of--" (p. 9). Jacques' blustering not only reminds him of his splendid past but also hides the wounds his pride probably suffered as a result of the attempted transaction. When Marguerite's purse is stolen Jacques grabs one of the street people and arrogantly demands, "You know who I am? I am Jacques Casanova! I belong to the Secret Order of the Rose-colored Cross! . . . Run back to Ahmed's. Contact the spiv that took the lady's purse. Tell him to keep it but give her back her papers! There'll be a large reward" (p. 61). In the old days which Jacques would like to return to, mentioning his name and offering a reward would probably have been effective in getting stolen property returned. In the play, however, he is held in so little esteem by those around him that he is publicly humiliated and thrown out of his hotel room. Also, he does not even have enough money to pay his own room and board at the time that he promises the reward.

Jacques' companion during much of Camino Real is Marguerite Gautier. She is, as Signi Falk mentions, a drug-user and the heroine of Dumas' novel La Dame aux Camélias.⁶ Her entrance on the stage is heralded by Gutman who says, "Ah, there's the music of another legend, one that everyone knows, the legend of the sentimental whore, the courtesan who made the mistake of love. But now you see her coming into this plaza

⁶ Signi Lenea Falk, Tennessee Williams (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 124.

not as she was when she burned with a fever that cast a thin light over Paris, but changed, yes, faded as lanterns and legends fade when they burn into day!" (pp. 58-59). Information is not always given concerning the immediate past of each transient in the play. In Marguerite's case, however, it is revealed that she came to the plaza after fleeing from a tuberculosis sanitarium called Bide-a-While. She knows she is ill, but she does not want to die in that place. She tells Jacques, "It has rows and rows of narrow white iron beds as regular as tombstones. . . . I wasn't released. I left without permission" (pp. 67-68). Actually, Marguerite does not want to stay at the Siete Mares Hotel any more than she wanted to stay at Bide-a-While. She repeatedly asks Jacques how and when they can flee from the Camino Real. When the Fugitivo arrives, the airplane which makes unscheduled stops at the plaza, Marguerite tries desperately to get a seat on it. She cries, "It's a way to escape from this abominable place! . . . It's a way out and I'm not going to miss it!" (p. 84). The extent of the importance of this escape to her becomes evident when she later admits to Jacques, "I would have--left--without you . . ." (p. 95). Her attempt to board the plane is unsuccessful, however, because she cannot find her passport in time.

Another escape mechanism which Marguerite utilizes during the play is sexual activity. Most of this behavior seems to occur with young men at a place called Ahmed's. Jacques disapproves of her actions not only because he is jealous but also because he knows she must rest if she is ever to regain her health.

JACQUES: Now, from now on, Marguerite, you must take better care of yourself. Do you hear me?

MARGUERITE: I hear you. No more distractions for me? No more entertainers in curtained and perfumed alcoves above the bazaar, no more young men that a pinch of white powder or puff of gray smoke can almost turn to someone devoutly remembered?

JACQUES: No, from now on-- (pp. 68-69)

When Marguerite says "Forgetting for a while where I am . . ." (p. 66), she indicates the real reason behind her trips to Ahmed's. While she is there she can escape an awareness of the brutal existence outside on the Camino Real. Also, while she is under the influence of drugs she is able to imagine that the young man with her is one of the lovers from her past. Such illusions enable her to feel young and desirable again and to avoid seeing herself as "one of those aging--voluptuaries-- who used to be paid for pleasure but now have to pay!" (p. 66). Allan Lewis observes that many of Williams' characters are unfortunate, sensitive people who try to preserve ideal images of themselves while their lives are falling in ruin about them.⁷ The ideal image which Marguerite would like to promote is of herself as the popular, attractive Lady of the Camellias. In order to escape the disappointment which afflicts her after her failure to leave on the Fugitivo, Marguerite arranges for another intimate encounter. She tells the Gypsy's son, "Run to Ahmed's! Tell the charming young man that the French lady's bored with her company tonight! Say that the French lady missed the Fugitivo

⁷ Allan Lewis, The Contemporary Theatre: The Significant Playwrights of Our Time (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1962), p. 287.

and wants to forget she missed it!" (pp. 98-99). Perhaps the best explanation for sexual activity on the Camino Real can be found when Marguerite says, "We're lonely. We're frightened. We hear the Street-cleaners' piping not far away. So now and then, although we've wounded each other time and again--we stretch out hands to each other in the dark that we can't escape from--we huddle together for some dim-communal comfort--and that's what passes for love on this terminal stretch of the road that used to be royal" (pp. 96-97). She herself is lonely and very much afraid of her approaching death, so it is obvious that she is talking about herself. But her words apply as well to the other frightened, isolated transients in this play and the countless escapists in Williams' other dramas. As Tischler notes, one of the keys to understanding Williams' world is realizing that in it sex provides escape from loneliness and a means of communication for all those people on earth awaiting their doom.⁸

Neither Jacques nor Marguerite accomplish the kind of escape from the plaza which they each desire to make. He decides to stay with her instead of accompanying Kilroy on his flight across the Terra Incognita, and she presumably dies. Several of the other transients in the play are also unable to achieve escape in the same way that Kilroy, Lord Byron, and Don Quixote do. For example, the Baron de Charlus is, as Falk notes, an aging masochistic homosexual from Proust's Remembrance of Things Past. He attempts to avoid the sordidness of the world around

⁸ Tischler, Tennessee Williams, p. 285.

him through his relationships with other men.⁹ However, in the play he dies and is carted away in the Streetcleaners' barrel before his evening rendezvous with an attractive younger man named Lobo. Sancho Panza, Don Quixote's squire, deserts his master on the outskirts of the plaza and retreats to La Mancha. His flight thus enables him to elude both the unpleasant aspects of the Camino Real and the implied attractions of the world across the wasteland. Lord and Lady Mulligan want to escape from the plaza together on the Fugitivo. He is ill and weak, and one evening she complains vigorously to Gutman about "These two idiots pushing a white barrel! Pop up every time we step outside the hotel!" (p. 57). The Mulligans try to hide from the Streetcleaners and death by staying inside the Siete Mares. On their way to the plane, however, Lord Mulligan does not recognize the Streetcleaners in their mortician disguises in time and dies before he can take a seat with his wife. Prudence Duvernoy is an old friend of Marguerite's from Paris. She is concerned about Marguerite's health and tells Jacques an unrealistic story about a wealthy old man who would be willing to take care of her. She persists with her tale until Jacques shocks her by calling it nothing but a dream. Both Prudence and another friend named Olympe manage to flee on the Fugitivo with the rest of the departing passengers. This escape attempt, however, proves to be spectacularly unsuccessful and futile as far as the desires of those on board are concerned. Late in the play the Gypsy is told by one of her assistants, "The Fugitivo has

⁹ Falk, Tennessee Williams, p. 123.

'fftt . . .'" (p. 109). Instead of flying away from the Camino Real and finding a better world in which to live, the passengers find death in the burning wreck of a crashed plane.

The escape made by the English romantic poet Lord Byron through the Terra Incognita precedes the flight accomplished across that same wasteland by Don Quixote and Kilroy. The reason behind Byron's journey can be found in the following dialogue with Gutman:

BYRON: The luxuries of this place have made me soft. The metal point's gone from my pen, there's nothing left but the feather.
 GUTMAN: That may be true. But what can you do about it?
 BYRON: Make a departure!
 GUTMAN: From yourself?
 BYRON: From my present self to myself as I used to be!
 GUTMAN: That's the furthest departure a man could make!

(pp. 73-74)

Byron is disturbed because he knows he has been neglecting his vocation as a poet. He has been paying more attention to the social life in the various cities he has been visiting than to the creation of verse. He tells Jacques, "I'm sailing to Athens. . . . I can sit quietly looking for a long, long time in absolute silence, and possibly, yes, still possibly--The old pure music will come to me again" (p. 78). Byron hopes that there he can begin to write again and thus avoid the total loss of his poetic abilities. What makes him an admirable character is that he is brave enough to make his journey even after admitting to himself the possibility that it might not solve his problem. As he says, "Of course on the other hand I may hear only the little noise of insects in the grass . . . But I am sailing to Athens! Make voyages! --Attempt them!--there's nothing else . . ." (p. 78). Byron wants to

escape from the unproductive life he has been living on the Camino Real and recapture the past in which he wrote good poetry and enjoyed his own self-esteem. Even the usually insensitive Gutman recognizes the difficulties involved in attempting such a recovery.

Don Quixote de la Mancha is the idealistic old knight from the novel by Cervantes. The fantasy which is Camino Real is the dream that he has between the time he is deserted by Sancho Panza and awakens to choose a new companion. Quixote has already traveled long distances by the time he reaches the Camino Real, and says that he has even further to go. In spite of his age and fatigue he still values nobility, truth, and valor. Sancho is afraid to go with his master into the plaza because of a chart which reads, "Halt . . . and turn back, Traveler, for the spring of humanity has gone dry in this place . . ." (p. 5). Quixote, however, enters the town bravely and declares, "The time for retreat never comes!" (p. 5). After waking up from his dream at the end of the play Quixote tells Kilroy, "Don't! Pity! Your! Self!" (p. 158). Quixote's actions are a good example of how well he heeds his own advice. Instead of feeling sorry for himself after being deserted by Sancho and giving up his quest, he stubbornly persists and escapes from the plaza the next day to continue his journey with Kilroy. His fortitude and optimism make him a gallant figure.

The mythical Kilroy is a young vagrant who is able to flee successfully from the fantasy world of the Camino Real. He became a wanderer after deserting his wife, an action prompted not by cruelty but by his concern for her welfare. Kilroy loved his wife and enjoyed the career

of a boxer. However, as he explains, "I've got a heart in my chest as big as the head of a baby. . . . The medics wouldn't okay me for no more fights. They said to give up liquor and smoking and sex! . . . My real true woman, my wife, she would of stuck with me, but it was all spoiled with her being scared and me, too, that a real hard kiss would kill me! --So one night while she was sleeping I wrote her good-bye . . ." (pp. 25-26). In order to escape having his wife be afraid of killing him, he leaves her. As Kilroy later asks Marguerite, "Why should a beautiful girl tie up with a broken-down champ?" (p. 146). He thinks his wife will be able to avoid this fate if he is not around. Esther Jackson indicates that the compassion or big-heartedness of this legendary World War II character is effectively symbolized by his heart which is as large as the head of a baby.¹⁰ Kilroy himself provides a reason for most of his actions in Camino Real when says, "I like situations I can get out of" (p. 112). After his wallet is stolen in the plaza, he is accused of vagrancy and sentenced to wear the outfit of a Patsy. Instead of putting on the costume, however, he runs away from the police, crying, "What's the best way out, if there is any way out? I got to find one. I had enough of this place. I had too much of this place" (p. 51). He is captured and forced to be the Patsy only after a long chase scene.

Like Marguerite Gautier, Kilroy knows he is in bad health and is afraid of dying. Part of his attempt to escape death is found in the

¹⁰ Esther Merle Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 124.

following conversation with the Gypsy:

GYPSY: . . . How big is your heart?
 KILROY: As big as the head of a baby.
 GYPSY: It's going to break.
 KILROY: That's what I was afraid of.
 GYPSY: The Streetcleaners are waiting for you outside
 the door.
 KILROY: Which door, the front one? I'll slip out the
 back! (p. 116)

When the Streetcleaners finally converge on him, he bravely struggles against them until he collapses. Jacques Casanova is the one who tells Kilroy that the way out of the Camino Real lies through the archway and across the Terra Incognita. The two of them would like to make the trip together, but ultimately only Kilroy is courageous enough to leave. The strength of his desire for flight is indicated when he pawns his treasured golden gloves in exchange for a disguise which he hopes will fool the Streetcleaners long enough for him to get away. Another motivation for Kilroy's escape from the plaza is his wish to avoid having his large golden heart put on display. He runs away from the place of dissection yelling, "Which way is out? Where's the Greyhound depot? Nobody's going to put my heart in a bottle in a museum and charge admission to support the rotten police!" (p. 152). Kilroy finally makes his way out when he flees with Don Quixote across the wasteland.

Camino Real is one of Williams' most symbolic and allegorical works. Several symbols and symbolic events relate directly to the theme of escapism in the play. For example, birds are used more than once to represent a character's desire to avoid existence in the plaza. In describing the Siete Mares Hotel Williams writes, "Upstairs is a small

balcony and behind it a large window exposing a wall on which is hung a phoenix painted on silk: this should be softly lighted now and then in the play, since resurrections are so much a part of its meaning"

(p. 1). The phoenix is a legendary bird which lived for five hundred years and then cremated itself. Out of the ashes of its funeral pyre came a new member of the species. Thus the phoenix is an appropriate symbol for Kilroy since for him death turns into life. He is reborn by the touch of La Madrecita's flowers after being subdued by the Streetcleaners and arises from her lap to grab his heart away from the medical instructor. The phoenix could also be associated with Lord Byron since he flees from the Camino Real hoping to resurrect his poetic talents. When Don Quixote reads from the chart about the plaza, he learns that the only birds there are those wild ones which have been tamed and are kept in cages. This image is recalled when Marguerite Gautier tells Jacques Casanova, "Caged birds accept each other but flight is what they long for" (p. 71). She is referring to the fact that although she and Jacques enjoy each other's company very much, they still wish to be somewhere other than on the Camino Real. Marguerite later says, "Oh, Jacques, . . . we're a pair of captive hawks caught in the same cage" (p. 96). The two of them, like the hawk, are proud creatures used to their freedom who are frustrated by their inability to escape from the cage-like atmosphere of the plaza. Caged birds also comprise the majority of the luggage which Lord Byron takes with him as he flees across the Terra Incognita.

Further symbolism is provided by an airplane, a lamp, and a suit-

case. The Fugitivo, by virtue of its name and the role it plays in the drama, is one of the more obvious symbols of escape in Camino Real. It is the airplane on which many would-be fugitives from the plaza secure seats. The crash of the Fugitivo indicates, however, that the plane was actually only an illusory means of escape for all those who depended upon it to take them to a better life in another city. Williams' use of the rosy light produced by a lamp as a symbol for the softening of truth is again present in Camino Real. After admitting that he is afraid of facing the world without her, Jacques goes on to tell Marguerite, "The only country, known or unknown that I can breathe in, or care to, is the country in which we breathe together, as we are now at this table. And later, a little while later, even closer than this, the sole inhabitants of a tiny world whose limits are those of the light from a rose-colored lamp--beside the sweetly, completely known country of your cool bed!" (p. 71). Jacques wants to escape an awareness of the true nature of the unpleasantness of the plaza by engaging in sexual activity with Marguerite. After learning that Jacques' remittance check has not yet arrived by mail, Gutman threatens to bar him from staying in the Siete Mares Hotel. The scene in which this eviction occurs contains some interesting symbolic effects.

JACQUES: Wait!-- [He takes the letter out of his pocket.]

. . . What does it say?

GUTMAN: --Remittances?

KILROY: [reading the letter over Jacques' shoulder]:

--discontinued . . .

[Gutman raises the portmanteau again.]

JACQUES: Careful, I have-- [The portmanteau lands with a crash. . . .] --fragile--mementoes . . .

(pp. 138-39)

The crashing of the suitcase to the ground at the same time that the discovery is made about the cancelled remittance checks represents the destruction of the illusions Jacques has been trying to maintain about soon being able to pay his bills. The mementoes are fragile and easily broken just as his dream that he will receive money is a weak defense against the hostile forces of the Camino Real. Since the objects in the portmanteau are relics from Jacques' past, their breakage can also represent the ultimate failure of his desires to recapture the splendor and vigor of his former life and thus escape the present circumstances of his existence in the plaza.

Two important symbols of escape appear at the end of Camino Real. "The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks!" (p. 161) is the curtain line spoken by Don Quixote as he and Kilroy make their exit from the plaza. In addition to all the other meanings associated with those words in the play, including the optimistic idea that tenderness has at last conquered the brutality of life in the square, the sentence also has a symbolic interpretation relating to escapism. The seeds for the flowers have to split the rocks in order for the violets to begin their existence in soil-filled crevices just as Lord Byron, Don Quixote, and Kilroy have to break the hold which those in the plaza have over them if they are to escape successfully from the Camino Real and begin a new life for themselves elsewhere. A symbolic event which also coincides with the departure from the plaza accomplished by Quixote and Kilroy is the resumption of activity by the fountain. It is the spring of humanity which is revitalized by the compassion of the fleeing

romanticists. The water escapes the control of whatever has been keeping it from moving and flows again in the same way that these two wanderers elude the oppressive forces of the Camino Real and make their way across the desert.

In dealing with the theme of escapism in Camino Real Williams uses an approach which differs from the one found in the realistic plays he had previously written. Of all the characters in the work who desire escape and have the opportunity to achieve it, three actually do accomplish a successful flight from the plaza without suffering any real degree of destruction or injury. Part of the reason for their success can be explained by examining the kind of world Williams has created for them on the Camino Real. As Kilroy says after spending a little while in the plaza, "This place is confusing to me. . . . Nothing seems real" (p. 39). He finds himself in a timeless town whose location is undetermined in which both factual and imaginary characters interact. Actions of the residents often seem unreasonably brutal, hostile, and corrupt. Events seem chaotic and unrelated. The majority of the drama is a dream had by one of the characters. As in any dream, the play, as Jackson points out, presents a montage of diverse circumstances, places, and times combined into a single whole.¹¹ Camino Real is expressionistic. Jordan Miller explains that expressionism is a type of antirealism. It is a dramatic form in which no confining physical limits are recognized. Since time is meaningless, a logical

¹¹ Jackson, Broken World of Williams, p. 51.

sequence of events is usually not followed.¹² It is because the Camino Real is so unreal and fantastic that the successful escapes are able to be accomplished. Nelson makes this quite clear in his discussion of the play. He notes that Kilroy, for example, is able to escape outwardly from the world of the plaza across the wasteland since the play is a fantasy in which all things are possible. In the realistic context of Williams' other plays, however, characters are ultimately able only to retreat from the world by journeying inwardly to insanity.¹³ For those who do not go insane, the only other alternative is usually death. The possibility of making a flight like Kilroy's is never available for those in the realistic plays because of the restrictions of the environments they inhabit.

Another explanation for the successful escapes found in Camino Real is that they are accomplished by characters who deserve to achieve them. Although the possibility of flight seems to exist for all the transients in the play, only Kilroy, Lord Byron, and Don Quixote find their way out. They are romantic, optimistic, courageous, and compassionate. Jackson feels that the concept of honor is important in the play. Quixote is a man of honor who hopes to find another honorable character to flee with him in the place of Sancho. Byron realizes that he has acted without honor by paying more attention to society than poetry and plans to remedy the situation by going to Greece. Kilroy

¹² Jordan Y. Miller, ed., American Dramatic Literature (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961), pp. 133-34.

¹³ Nelson, Tennessee Williams, p. 179.

has conducted himself honorably in the prize ring by never hitting a low blow and always breaking clean from the clinches.¹⁴ As William Hawkins suggests, the shackles which keep the other characters prisoners in the plaza are the weaknesses in their personalities.¹⁵ Sancho Panza is a skeptic and coward who deserts Quixote before entering the Camino Real and thus loses his chance to go on through the plaza to a better life. Lord and Lady Mulligan reveal their lack of compassion when they complain at the Siete Mares Hotel about Jacques and Marguerite, "Waiter! That adventurer and his mistress must not be seated next to Lord Mulligan's table!" (p. 62). Because of their prejudice, he dies in the plaza and she perishes in the crash of the Fugitivo. Prudence Duvernoy and Olympe are also passengers on the ill-fated Fugitivo. Their selfish, disgraceful conduct during the melee before the departure of the plane keep them from deserving a successful escape. Marguerite Gautier reveals her selfishness and desperation when she attempts to leave on the Fugitivo without Jacques. He loves her very much, but she doubts the power of true devotion and says they have only grown used to each other. She admits her lack of compassion when she warns him she will be unfaithful to him.

MARGUERITE [almost tenderly touching his face] : Don't
you know that tonight I am going to betray you?

JACQUES: --Why would you do that?

MARGUERITE: Because I've out-lived the tenderness of my heart.
(p. 97)

¹⁴ Jackson, Broken World of Williams, pp. 116-17, 124.

¹⁵ William Hawkins, "Camino Real Reaches the Printed Page," Theatre Arts, 37 (1953), 96.

Jacques himself would seem to deserve escape from the Camino Real. His treatment of Marguerite as well as the following example of his compassion for Kilroy the Patsy are admirable: "Kilroy crosses to Jacques and beckons him out behind the crowd. There he snatches off the antlers and returns him his fedora. Jacques reciprocates by removing Kilroy's fright wig and electric nose. They embrace as brothers" (p. 101).

Jacques, however, lacks the courage to leave Marguerite and the town behind him. For this reason, he is not one of the few characters in Camino Real who accomplish successful flights from the plaza. According to Fedder, there are only five alternatives available for the transients in the play. Those searching for escape may choose the sterile conformity of the Siete Mares Hotel, the shabby degradation of the Ritz Men Only, the illusory world of the Fugitivo, the dehumanization of the dissecting laboratory, or the unmapped country of the Terra Incognita. The Baron, Jacques, Marguerite, and the others each succumb to one of the first four destinies. Only Kilroy, Lord Byron, and Don Quixote are courageous enough to go into the wilderness.¹⁶ Thus the three of them make their way across the Terra Incognita without suffering any ill effects because the play is a fantasy and because they possess the qualities which Williams seems to admire most in man.

¹⁶ Fedder, Influence of Lawrence on Williams, pp. 96-97.

VI. SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH

Tennessee Williams' Sweet Bird of Youth opened in New York at the Martin Beck Theatre on March 10, 1959.¹ In this drama Williams again deals with characters who make desperate attempts to escape from the real world. The physical setting of the play on the stage is somewhat less realistic than that devised by the author for The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire. Williams writes, for example, in a note on the special effects found in the work, "The stage is backed by a cyclorama. . . . There are nonrealistic projections on this 'cyc,' the most important and constant being a grove of royal palm trees."² Also, furniture and props in specific scenes are kept at a minimum and walls are only suggested. However, the environment inhabited by the characters is quite different from the symbolic, timeless fantasy-land of Camino Real and does not permit escapists to flee unharmed from it in the manner of Kilroy, Lord Byron, and Don Quixote. The action of Sweet Bird of Youth occurs on a modern Easter Sunday either in the Royal Palms Hotel or the home of politician Boss Finley in the town of St. Cloud on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. One character persists in his flight from reality and pursuit of illusion until, like escapists

¹ Tennessee Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth, Signet Books (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1959), p. xiii.

² Tennessee Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth (New York: New Directions, 1959), p. 2. All further quotations from this edition will be indicated parenthetically.

in most of Williams' other plays, he is destroyed. Another, however, abandons her escape efforts and accepts the reality of her life. The fact that she is a more interesting and admirable figure than her doomed partner may indicate that although Williams does have sympathy and compassion for those sensitive individuals who are unable to face adversities without evasion and would permit them to escape successfully if they were in a world in which that were possible, he nevertheless places more value on those people who have the strength and courage to endure in spite of their difficulties.

The principal escapists in Sweet Bird of Youth are Chance Wayne and Alexandra Del Lago, also known as the Princess Kosmonopolis. Popkin describes Chance and the Princess as two of Williams' typical character types and calls them Adonis and the Gargoyle. Adonis is usually a healthy, handsome, extremely virile young man. The Gargoyle, on the other hand, is generally an older, nervous woman who is worried about losing her looks. Adonis, threatened by corruption from those who hate or envy him, is interested in his present life. In contrast, the Gargoyle is most often concerned with some event in her past. The rest of the cast in a Williams' play act as foils for this couple. Logically, the men are less attractive than Adonis and the women are more attractive than the Gargoyle.³ In Sweet Bird of Youth some of these foils include Boss Finley, Dr. George Scudder, and Heavenly Finley. They also act as escapists, primarily by telling lies and

³ Popkin, "Plays of Williams," pp. 45-49.

using deception in attempts to cover up the truth of various situations. Escape mechanisms employed by Chance and the Princess include flight, sexual activity, liquor, drugs, memory lapses, and a dependence upon dreams and illusions.

Chance Wayne is a twenty-nine-year-old native of St. Cloud. For the past ten years he has been unrealistically pursuing the dream that he will become a movie star. One motive for his actions is his wish to escape what he considers to be the boring life of his contemporaries who have settled down. As Fedder notes, Chance is unable to adjust to life in a small town.⁴ Tischler states also that he refuses to accept his own mediocrity.⁵ He tells the Princess, "I was a twelve-pound baby, normal and healthy, but with some kind of quantity 'X' in my blood, a wish or a need to be different" (p. 36). His illusions about a movie career are also prompted by a desire to avoid having Boss Finley think he is not worthy enough to marry his daughter Heavenly. Unfortunately, Finley's attitude toward him remains hostile. As Chance says, "He figured his daughter rated someone a hundred, a thousand percent better than me, Chance Wayne" (p. 41). Part of Chance's problem stems from the fact that he achieved a certain amount of fame early in his life and then was unable to turn it into any sort of lasting recognition. He explains to Aunt Nonnie that he lives on wild dreams because of what was expected of him after he directed and starred in the one-act

⁴ Fedder, Influence of Lawrence on Williams, p. 103.

⁵ Tischler, Tennessee Williams, p. 266.

play that won the state drama contest when he was just seventeen. The play did not win the national drama contest that year, however, because Chance forgot part of his dialogue. In order to evade some of the pain caused by the defeat, he deludes himself into believing that the play won second place until Aunt Nonnie faces the truth and tells him, "Chance, you didn't place second. You got honorable mention. Fourth place, except it was just called honorable mention" (p. 71). On the way back to St. Cloud after the national contest, Chance and Heavenly have their first sexual encounter. The pleasure which they share enables him to forget about his humiliating performance in the play. A pattern of failure followed by flight soon establishes itself in Chance's life. At first his theatrical prospects seem good. He proudly tells the Princess, "Hell when they [my contemporaries] were still freshmen at Tulane or LSU or Ole Miss, I sang in the chorus of the biggest show in New York, in 'Oklahoma,' and had pictures in LIFE in a cowboy outfit, tossin' a ten-gallon hat in the air!" (p. 37). However, he is never quite able to become a star.

CHANCE: . . . I've had more chances than I could count on my fingers, and made the grade almost, but not quite, every time. Something always blocks me. . . .

PRINCESS: What? What? Do you know? . . . Fear?

CHANCE: No not fear, but terror. . . . (pp. 29-30)

Perhaps he is so afraid of giving another embarrassing performance that he removes himself from a production before such a disaster can occur again. Ironically, his fear of failure is what causes him to fail. Every time this happens, he retreats to St. Cloud and engages in sexual activity with Heavenly. As he tells the Princess, "Yes, after each

disappointment, each failure at something, I'd come back to her like going to a hospital" (p. 40).

Chance's quest for stardom is interrupted by military service in Korea when he is twenty-three years old. He joins the Navy only when it becomes apparent that he is about to be drafted by the Army, and then exhibits more escapist behavior. He does not want to waste his youth overseas away from those who could give him acting jobs. He explains his frustration to the Princess saying, "By the time I got out, Christ knows, I might be nearly thirty! Who would remember Chance Wayne?" (p. 38). He is disturbed even further by the realization that he might be going bald and the fear that he might be killed in the war. Therefore, as he later relates, "I started to have bad dreams. Nightmares and cold sweats at night, and I had palpitations, and on my leaves I got drunk and woke up in strange places with faces on the next pillow I had never seen before. . . . I cracked up, my nerves did. I got a medical discharge" (pp. 38-39). Again, he comes home to Heavenly and the comfort of her love. When he is ready to leave, he resumes his search for an acting career. He travels a great deal and even spends some time in Los Angeles. He meets the Princess, however, while he is working as a beach-boy at a hotel in Palm Beach. Instead of using his real name, he lies and calls himself Carl. He also lies when questioned about the job by people in St. Cloud. Since he would prefer them to believe him to be an actor under contract to a motion picture studio, he denies having worked at the hotel and says, "I long ago gave up tracking down sources of rumors about me. Of course, it's flattering,

it's gratifying to know that you're still being talked about in your old home town, even if what they say is completely fantastic" (p. 78).

According to the Princess, her meeting with Chance was largely the result of their common interest in smoking hashish. She tells him, "It was this mutual practice that brought us together. When you came in my cabana to give me one of those papaya cream rubs, you sniffed, you grinned and said you'd like a stick too" (p. 27). Several times during the play Chance reacts to pressure situations by drinking and taking drugs. During a conversation with Aunt Nonnie in which she warns him to leave town before Boss Finley can find him and hurt him, "He takes a pill and a swallow from a flask" (p. 69). He washes down another pill with vodka after she abruptly leaves him. Her desertion probably disturbs him more than her words of warning since in the past she stood by him and helped arrange his meetings with Heavenly. Thus he seeks to escape his disappointment over her departure by becoming "high." During a confrontation with some of his former friends in the Royal Palms Hotel cocktail lounge, Chance admits that he has just taken a goof-ball with a drink of vodka. In contrast to their behavior during some of his previous trips home, these people are hostile and disrespectful toward him. Perhaps he thinks that liquor and drugs will give him enough courage and confidence to escape the fear and insecurity which their unfriendliness causes him to feel.

Chance's interest in the Princess Kosmonopolis is prompted by his desire that she aid him in his unrealistic pursuit of a movie career. When they first meet in Palm Beach, she tells him that she owns more

than half of the stock in a Hollywood studio. Chance coerces her into providing him with a contract to sign even though he suspects that it might not be binding. Even after she admits "I can get out of it [the contract] if I wanted to. And so can the studio." (p. 29), he flaunts the document in front of people in St. Cloud. He tries to impress Aunt Nonnie with it in order to escape the truth of her accusation that he lives only on dreams.

CHANCE: These are genuine papers. Look at the notary's seal and the signatures of the three witnesses on them. Aunt Nonnie, do you know who I'm with? I'm with Alexandra Del Lago, the Princess Kosmonopolis is my--

AUNT NONNIE: Is your what?

CHANCE: Patroness! Agent! Producer! She hasn't been seen much lately, but still has influence, power, and money--money that can open all doors. That I've knocked at all these years till my knuckles are bloody. (p. 72)

He later shows the contract to Boss Finley's mistress Miss Lucy and two of his contemporaries named Bud and Scotty since he would like to deceive them into believing him to be a success. He lies and says not only that he has been signed to play in a movie called "Youth" but also that Heavenly will probably appear in it with him. Von Szeliski observes that Sweet Bird of Youth is a tragedy of illusory identity whose protagonists live in conflict between the idealized self and the real self.⁶ This is certainly true with regard to the life of Chance Wayne. In discussing his contract with Miss Lucy, Chance gets somewhat carried away by the strength of his illusion.

⁶ Von Szeliski, "Williams and the Tragedy of Sensitivity," p. 203.

CHANCE: Miss Lucy I'm traveling with the vice-president and major stockholder of the film studio which just signed me.

MISS LUCY: Wasn't she once in the movies and very well known?

CHANCE: She was and still is and never will cease to be an important, a legendary figure in the picture industry, here and all over the world, and I am now under personal contract to her.

MISS LUCY: What's her name, Chance?

CHANCE: She doesn't want her name known. Like all great figures, world-known, she doesn't want or need and refuses to have the wrong type of attention. Privacy is a luxury to great stars. Don't ask me her name. I respect her too much to speak her name at this table. (p. 82)

His exaggerations about the Princess and his relationship with her are all a part of his inability to accept the reality of his existence. Another facet of Chance's illusions about the Princess is the plan he concocts to have himself and Heavenly "discovered" as promising young movie stars. He outlines the project saying, "The idea briefly, a local contest of talent to find a pair of young people to star as unknowns in a picture you're planning to make to show your faith in YOUTH, Princess. You stage this contest, you invite other judges, but your decision decides it!" (p. 42). Unfortunately, the contest is never held and the plan proves to be just as unproductive as the worthless contract. In the face of these disappointments, Chance tries to cover up his feelings of frustration by yet another attempt to deceive people in his home town. He tells the Princess, "I want this big display. Big phony display in your Cadillac around town. And a wad a dough to flash in their faces and the fine clothes you've bought me, on me" (p. 44). "That's the deal for tonight," he continues, "to toot those silver horns and drive slowly around in the Cadillac convertible so everybody that thought I was washed up will see me" (p. 44).

Alexandra Del Lago is an aging movie actress who experiments with various types of escape mechanisms throughout Sweet Bird of Youth. When she meets Chance Wayne in Palm Beach, she is in the process of fleeing from what she thinks was the failure of her recent comeback attempt. Against her better judgment, she let herself be persuaded to come out of retirement and make another film. She describes her actions after seeing a close-up of herself at the premiere of the movie by telling Chance, "I heard them [in the audience] whisper, their shocked whispers. Is that her? Is that her? . . . I rose from my seat and began the interminable retreat from the city of flames, up, up, up the unbearably long theatre aisle. . . . At last . . . I . . . tried to run down the marble stairs, tripped of course, fell and, rolled, rolled, like a sailor's drunk whore to the bottom. . . . After that? Flight, just flight, not interrupted until I woke up this morning" (pp. 24-25). Rather than stay and face the unfavorable reviews which she is sure her performance will receive, she runs away. "Oh, Chance, believe me," she later tells him, "after failure comes flight" (p. 93). She wanders across the country from Hollywood trying to escape both recognition by other people and her memories of the premiere. Instead of using her own name, she registers in hotels as the Princess Kosmonopolis. She does so, she admits, "to avoid getting any reports or condolences on the disaster I ran from" (p. 28). When Chance talks to the manager of the hotel in St. Cloud and calls her Alexandra Del Lago, she shouts angrily at him, "Don't use my name!" (p. 12). One of the main reasons why the Princess balks at being a part of Chance's

plan to put on a local talent contest for himself and Heavenly to win is that sponsorship of such an event would put her back into the public eye. "Have you forgotten," she asks him, ". . . that any public attention is what I least want in the world?" (p. 43).

Like so many of Williams' other escapists, the Princess relies on sexual activity to blot out an awareness of circumstances in her life which trouble her. As she tells Chance, "When I say now, the answer must not be later. I have only one way to forget these things I don't want to remember and that's through the act of love-making. That's the only dependable distraction so when I say now, because I need that distraction, it has to be now, not later" (p. 34). During the course of the play, Chance provides this type of distraction to enable her to forget her comeback attempt. The Princess also reveals, however, that she had several young lovers while she was still in retirement. Although she realizes that she left her career at the right time in her life, she says that she did not like being retired. She explains her unhappiness by telling Chance, "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" (p. 23). She did not enjoy the typical pursuits of retired movie stars such as painting or giving acting lessons. Therefore, to escape her boredom, she experienced sexual intimacies with younger men.

Another activity which the Princess engages in during her retire-

ment is the consumption of drugs. She describes it as a valuable practice which "put to sleep the tiger that raged in my nerves" (p. 23). Her nervousness stems from the fact that she retired when she was not really old. She explains her dissatisfaction with her situation by saying, ". . . if I had just been old but you see, I wasn't old. . . . I just wasn't young, not young, young. I just wasn't young anymore" (p. 23). Perhaps another reason, then, for her fondness for young lovers can be found in her desire to avoid the no-man's-land between not being young anymore and not yet being old by recapturing her youth through her relationships with them. The Princess continues to take drugs during her stay with Chance in the Royal Palms Hotel in St. Cloud. For one awful moment, the details of her flight from Hollywood crowd back into her mind and she cries out, "Oh God, I remember the thing I wanted not to. The goddam end of my life!" (p. 21). In order once again to avoid being upset by these memories, she smokes a hashish cigarette. Soon after she awakens in Act One, she asks Chance to bring her a pink pill and a glass of vodka. Later in the play it is revealed that the pills are goof-balls. The following dialogue between Chance and the Princess while she is drinking vodka indicates the nature of their desires to avoid thinking about certain unpleasant events in their lives:

PRINCESS: . . . I want to forget everything, I want to forget who I am. . . .

CHANCE: [handing her the drink] : He said that . . .

PRINCESS [drinking] : Please shut up, I'm forgetting!

CHANCE [taking the glass from her] : Okay, go on forget. There's nothing better than that, I wish I could do it. . . .

PRINCESS: I can, I will. I'm forgetting . . . I'm forgetting. . . . (p. 12)

He would like to forget all the attempts he has made to launch an acting career which have ended in failure. Similarly, she would like to forget that she is Alexandra Del Lago, an actress whose recent comeback attempt was a terrible fiasco. Also, there is some indication in the play that the Princess has a medical problem whose reality she would like to deny. She often feels so short-winded that she has to take oxygen from a small cylinder.

CHANCE: You're still breathing like a quarter horse that's been run a full mile. Are you sure you don't want a doctor?

PRINCESS: No, for God's sake . . . no!

CHANCE: Why are you scared of doctors?

PRINCESS [hoarsely, quickly] : I don't need them. What happened is nothing at all. It happens frequently to me. Something disturbs me . . . adrenalin's pumped in my blood and I get short-winded, that's all, that's all there is to it . . . (p. 13)

Instead of admitting that she is really ill, she prefers to offer another reason for her breathing difficulties. Only once does she allude to what her real problem might be. She tells Chance, "Whether or not I do have a disease of the heart that places an early terminal date on my life, no mention of that, no reference to it ever. No mention of death, never, never a word on that odious subject" (pp. 33-34).

Deliberate memory lapses are used by the Princess in her attempts to escape an awareness of the disastrous circumstances surrounding the resumption of her acting career.

CHANCE: You put on a good deal of weight after that disappointment you had last month.

PRINCESS [hitting him with a small pillow] : What disappointment? I don't remember any.

CHANCE: Can you control your memory like that?

PRINCESS: Yes. I've had to learn to. (p. 14)

Chance Wayne is somewhat envious of her ability not to remember things at will since there are certain disappointments which he has experienced throughout his own life which he would prefer not to have in his memory to bother him. Unfortunately for him, however, there is no indication in the play that he is ever able to control his mind in this way. One reason for this as well as an interesting difference in the personalities of Chance and the Princess can be found in the following conversation:

PRINCESS: I tell you I don't remember, it's all gone away!

CHANCE: I don't believe in amnesia.

PRINCESS: Neither do I. But you have to believe a thing that happens to you. (p. 15)

It is doubtful that Chance will ever be a victim of amnesia, deliberate or otherwise, if he does not believe that it exists. The Princess, on the other hand, perhaps because her need for the relief provided by amnesia was more sudden and of greater intensity than Chance's, does believe that it has happened to her. One disadvantage accompanying her memory lapse is revealed when the Princess tells Chance, "It gives you an awful trapped feeling this, this memory block. . . . I feel as if someone I loved had died lately, and I don't want to remember who it could be" (p. 18). Her attitude toward this dead loved one could refer to the image of herself as the young Alexandra Del Lago which she is afraid was destroyed by the revealing close-ups during the film she made in her recent comeback attempt. Rather than be hurt by the painful memories of this demise, the Princess blots out the details of the tragedy until only a vague uneasiness remains. This uneasiness

is disturbing, but it is not nearly as unpleasant as a full revelation of the reality of her desperate flight from Hollywood would be.

Chance and the Princess employ many of the same escape mechanisms in Sweet Bird of Youth. Both of them are concerned about youth and success. Donahue states that they try to recapture their own "sweet bird of youth" in order to escape the destructiveness of the inevitable march of time.⁷ A major part of their desire to avoid the ill effects of time involves a wish to remain physically attractive. Chance, for example, worries about possible baldness and laments, "I couldn't go past my youth, but I've gone past it" (p. 112). The Princess admits, "They told me I was an artist, not just a star whose career depended on youth. But I knew in my heart that the legend of Alexandra del Lago couldn't be separated from an appearance of youth" (p. 23). Jackson observes that characters in the play share a common pursuit of the illusory god of success.⁸ The success which Chance and the Princess covet in order to elude lives of mediocrity and inactivity involves either beginning or resuming an acting career. The fates of these two figures, however, are quite different. The reason for this is that she ultimately abandons her escapist activities and accepts the reality of her situation in the world while he persists in his escapist behavior until he is destroyed by his enemies in St. Cloud. The change made by the Princess occurs when she hears the good news that her

⁷ Donahue, Dramatic World of Williams, pp. 118, 227.

⁸ Jackson, Broken World of Williams, p. 148.

comeback attempt was not a complete disaster. Thus the real world which she rejoins is a more pleasant place than that which she sought to hide from. However, as Williams points out in the play, the Princess is also aware that her decision to return to Hollywood does not necessarily guarantee that all her problems with her career are over. She realizes that her future may never be as bright as her past. Her ability to endure in spite of this knowledge contrasts with the way in which Chance gives up when his dreams do not come true.

Chance Wayne comes back to his home town planning to win a fraudulent talent contest with Heavenly and take her away with him to Hollywood. Instead of depending on his own acting ability, he relies on the Princess to pick himself and Heavenly as the winners of the contest. His love for Boss Finley's daughter is so strong that even after being threatened with violence if he sees her again he says, "I'm used to that threat. I'm not going to leave St. Cloud without my girl" (p. 9). Chance is certain that Heavenly will defy her father and not appear with him at a political rally. Therefore, when he sees that she does go to the meeting after all and is thus so much under the Boss's control that she will probably never be able to run away with him, he gives up all hope of self-preservation. Instead of fighting to save himself and live more realistically in the world, he says that he does not care what happens to him.

PRINCESS [as CHANCE returns to her] : Chance, for God's sake, let's go now . . . [She tries to hold him.]

CHANCE: Keep your grabbing hands off me.

[Marchers offstage start to sing "Bonnie Blue Flag."]

PRINCESS: There's no one but me to hold you back from destruction in this place.

CHANCE: I don't want to be held. (pp. 93-94)

Even though there is actually very little possibility that the contest will be held or that he and Heavenly will leave St. Cloud together, Chance stubbornly clings to the illusion that the two of them will become famous. His behavior while the Princess is talking on the telephone to the Hollywood columnist Sally Powers indicates how determined he is to believe in his dream of instant recognition by the critics.

CHANCE [as if to himself] : Tell her that you've discovered a pair of new stars. Two of them.

PRINCESS: One moment, Sally, I'm--breathless!

CHANCE [gripping her arm] : And lay it on thick. Tell her to break it tomorrow in her column, in all of her columns, and in her radio talks . . . that you've discovered a pair of young people who are the stars of tomorrow!

PRINCESS [to CHANCE] : Go into the bathroom. Stick your head under cold water. . . . Sally . . . Do you really think so? . . . My talent? In what way, Sally? More depth? . . .

CHANCE: Cut the chatter. Talk about me and HEAVENLY!
(pp. 107-108)

Finally, instead of accepting the truth of his situation and seeking safety by leaving St. Cloud, Chance stays in the city and is castrated by Boss Finley's henchmen.

The Princess Kosmonopolis, on the other hand, is able to save herself from destruction by going back to the real world from which she fled so hastily. In a bit of symbolic action, she decides to talk to Sally Powers and face the truth about her comeback attempt.

CHANCE: Is that you, Miss Powers? This is Chance Wayne talking . . . I'm calling for the Princess Kosmonopolis, she wants to speak to you. She'll come to the phone in a minute. . . .

PRINCESS: I can't. . . . Say I've . . .

CHANCE [stretching phone cord] : This is as far as I can stretch the cord, Princess, you've got to meet it halfway.

[PRINCESS hesitates; then advances to the extended phone.] (p. 107)

Thus she ends her behavior as an escapist by having the strength and courage to go to the phone in spite of her fears that she might hear unfavorable criticism about her performance. Happily for her, she learns that the film was not a failure after all. She also begins to use her own name again. Tischler calls this recovery made by the Princess the most significant one found in any of Williams' plays.⁹ Perhaps as an explanation for the fact that the Princess makes a recovery and Chance does not, it is interesting to note that she seems ultimately to be the more admirable character. Even though he attempts to blackmail her with a tape recording about her experiences with drugs into giving him money, she still feels compassion for him. She tells him, "Chance, when I saw you driving under the window with your head held high, with that terrible stiff-necked pride of the defeated which I know so well; I knew that your come-back had been a failure like mine. And I felt something in my heart for you" (p. 87). She also tries to get him to leave St. Cloud with her when it becomes apparent that he will be in danger if he stays. The contrast in their behavior is revealed quite clearly when she says, "You've just been using me. Using me. When I needed you downstairs you shouted, 'Get her a wheel chair.'" Well, I didn't need a wheel chair, I came up alone, as

⁹ Tischler, Tennessee Williams, p. 272.

always" (p. 109). Instead of having any real feelings for her, Chance has selfishly used her to promote his dream of the talent contest. He appropriates her Cadillac in order to enhance the illusion that he is a success. Another aspect of the Princess's strength is revealed when Williams says of her, "For the PRINCESS: a little, very temporary, return to, recapture of, the spurious glory. The report from SALLY POWERS may be and probably is a factually accurate report: but to indicate she is going on to further triumph would be to falsify her future. She makes this instinctive admission to herself when she sits down by CHANCE on the bed, facing the audience" (p. 112). She bravely returns to Hollywood even though she knows there may be trouble ahead. She accepts this fact and does not let it deter her from her recent decision to cease being an escapist.

In addition to Chance and the Princess, Sweet Bird of Youth contains other characters who try to escape from unpleasant realities in their lives. None of them, however, ever attempt to abandon their escapist behavior in the manner of Alexandra Del Lago. George Scudder is chief of staff at the Thomas J. Finley Hospital in St. Cloud. He is the doctor who performs a hysterectomy on Heavenly Finley after she is infected with venereal disease. As he tells Heavenly's father, "I went to fantastic lengths to preserve the secrecy of that operation" (p. 43). Quite naturally, for Heavenly's sake, he wishes to avoid having the public find out the reason behind the surgery. When Chance comes back to St. Cloud, Scudder goes to him to warn him to leave town before Boss Finley and his son Tom Junior learn that he is there and

try to harm him. He also speaks of a letter he wrote Chance telling him about the whole situation. In both instances, however, Scudder avoids giving the names of those involved and mentioning specific details. He says only, "In this letter I just told you that a certain girl we know had to go through an awful experience, a tragic ordeal, because of past contact with you" (p. 8). As revenge for what happened to his sister, Tom Junior plans to carry out the threat of castration which his father made against Chance. Scudder reacts to the news of the impending attack with another bit of evasion. He protests, "I know what you mean, Tom Junior, but I couldn't be involved in it. I can't even know about it" (p. 49). Heavenly Finley's behavior after her operation also includes a certain amount of escapism. She tries to avoid having her father harm Chance by saying that he was not the one who infected her. The operation itself upsets her so much that she decides to run away from the world and enter a convent.

For several years Aunt Nonnie was the only member of the Finley household who approved of Heavenly's meetings with Chance Wayne. When Chance tries to see her niece after the operation, however, instead of helping him to do so, she urges him to leave St. Cloud before Boss Finley finds out he has returned. At first she tries to escape having any contact with him in the hope that she can keep his presence in the town a secret from her vindictive brother-in-law. Thus when Chance calls her on the telephone at the Finley home to ask what has happened to Heavenly, she says she cannot talk to him and hangs up. His effort to speak with her in person at her home is similarly unsuccessful.

CHANCE [offstage] : Aunt Nonnie! Hey, Aunt Nonnie!

BOSS: What's he shouting?

TOM JUNIOR: He's shouting at Aunt Nonnie.

BOSS: Where is she?

TOM JUNIOR: Runnin' up the drive like a dog-track rabbit.

BOSS: He ain't followin', is he?

TOM JUNIOR: Nope. He's drove away.

.
BOSS: Why didn't you answer that good-lookin' boy in the
Cadillac car that shouted at you, Nonnie?

NONNIE: Oh, I hoped you hadn't seen him. (pp. 51-52)

Eventually, her concern for Chance's safety prompts her to seek him out at the Royal Palms Hotel and plead with him to leave town. In response to his invitation to have a drink with him in the cocktail lounge of the hotel, she leads him outside into the palm garden saying, "I can't be seen talking to you" (p. 68). When Chance asks her what has happened to make people act so strangely toward him in his home town, she finds herself unable to tell him about Heavenly's operation. She accuses him of already knowing the reason behind the hostility of his former friends and says, "I'm not going to talk about it. I just can't talk about it" (p. 69). She flees from the garden and leaves him alone after hearing his plan to win the fake talent contest and issuing him a final warning to leave town without trying to see Heavenly.

Boss Finley's escapist behavior in Sweet Bird of Youth consists for the most part of telling lies and deliberately deceiving those around him. His lies about Heavenly's operation stem not only from his fatherly desire to avoid having her become the subject of a public scandal but also from his concern for his own political future. He outlines the deception which he plans to perpetrate on the voters with her help when he tells his daughter,

Now, tonight, I'm addressing the Youth for Tom Finley clubs in the ballroom of the Royal Palms Hotel. My speech is going out over a national TV network, and Missy, you're going to march in the ballroom on my arm. You're going to be wearing the stainless white of a virgin, with a Youth for Tom Finley button on one shoulder and a corsage of lilies on the other. You're going to be on the speaker's platform with me, you on one side of me and Tom Junior on the other, to scotch these rumors about your corruption. . . . Lookin' at you, all in white like a virgin, nobody would dare to speak or believe the ugly stories about you. I'm relying a great deal on this campaign to bring in young voters for the crusade I'm leading. I'm all that stands between the South and the black days of Reconstruction.
(pp. 61-62)

Unfortunately for them both, however, Boss Finley is unable to keep Heavenly's surgery a secret. A heckler appears at political gatherings and taunts him with the following questions: "How about your daughter's operation? How about that operation your daughter had done on her at the Thomas J. Finley hospital here in St. Cloud? Did she put on black in mourning for her appendix?" (p. 98). In order to silence the heckler and thus escape the truth of his queries, Boss Finley has him severely beaten. He also attempts to keep truth from the voters by denying that he had anything to do with the castration of a young black man. Boss Finley reacts to the planned castration of Chance Wayne, even though it is his idea as revenge for what happened to his daughter, in the same way George Scudder reacts.

BOSS: I want him [Chance] gone by tomorrow--tomorrow commences at midnight.

TOM JUNIOR: I know what to do, Papa. Can I use the boat?

BOSS: Don't ask me, don't tell me nothin'--

TOM JUNIOR: Can I have The Starfish tonight?

BOSS: I don't want to know how, just go about it. (p. 49)

Deception and lies are just as much a part of Finley's relationships

with his son and late wife as they are with Heavenly. For example, he tries both to keep the reality of some of Tom Junior's actions away from the attention of the public and to elude the consequences of the rest of his behavior that others do find out about.

TOM JUNIOR: I got more newspaper coverage in the last six months than . . .

BOSS: Once for drunk drivin', once for a stag party you thrown in Capitol City that cost me five thousand dollars to hush it up!

TOM JUNIOR: You are so unjust, it . . .

BOSS: And everyone knows you had to be drove through school like a blazeface mule pullin' a plow uphill: flunked out of college with grades that only a moron would have an excuse for.

TOM JUNIOR: I got re-admitted to college.

BOSS: At my insistence. By fake examinations, answers provided beforehand, stuck in your fancy pockets.

(p. 54)

Again, his motive includes desires to protect both the reputation of his child and his own chances for political success. Miss Lucy is Boss Finley's mistress whose existence he would like to keep secret from his family. Therefore, even when Tom Junior and Heavenly mention her to him, he lies about knowing her and asks, "Who is Miss Lucy?" (pp. 54, 59). In addition to deceiving his wife about Miss Lucy, Finley tries to trick her during her last illness into believing she is not going to die. As he tells his daughter, ". . . I knowed she was dyin' when I bought her that clip, and I bought that clip for fifteen thousand dollars mainly to make her think she was going to get well. . . . And she sat up as bright as a little bird in that bed with the diamond clip on, receiving callers all day, . . . and she died before midnight, with that diamond clip on her" (pp. 59-60).

Symbols can be found which relate to the behavior of several of the escapists in Sweet Bird of Youth. When Alexandra Del Lago is first seen in the play, she is asleep wearing a black satin eyemask. This mask enables her eyes to escape the morning glare just as her deliberate memory lapses enable her mind to avoid an awareness of her disastrous comeback attempt. Chance Wayne tries to impress people in St. Cloud by driving around town in a Cadillac wearing expensive clothes and showing off a contract with a motion picture studio. In reality, however, the car belongs to the Princess, the clothes were bought for him with her money, and the contract is so full of loopholes that it can be easily broken. Thus these items represent the illusion of success which Chance would like to surround himself with in order to elude having acquaintances in his home town think of him as a failure. The song which Chance sings in the cocktail lounge of the Royal Palms Hotel, "It's a Big Wide Wonderful World," is another rather ironic symbol of this illusion of success. The song contains the lines, "When you're in love you're a master of all you survey, you're a gay Santa Claus" (p. 75). In contrast to the image presented in these lyrics, Chance is hardly the master of anything in the world. He is traveling with an older actress using her money and reputation to launch his acting career and in danger of being castrated by the father of the girl he loves. After being disturbed by a heckler who asks embarrassing questions about his daughter's recent operation to cure venereal disease, Boss Finley plans to have Heavenly appear with him at his next political rally in a spotless white dress. He wishes to present her as a virgin

in an attempt to deny the truth of her corruption. The dress, then, becomes the symbol of the escape from reality he would like to achieve by means of the illusion of Heavenly's innocence. Popkin's discussion of Sweet Bird of Youth includes an examination of symbols of resurrection. Action in the play occurs on Easter Sunday, the day of resurrection. Chance wishes to escape the effect of his past failures and be reborn as a promising young actor. Boss Finley hopes to avoid losing votes as a result of the questions asked by the heckler and revitalize his political campaign. Only the Princess, however, accomplishes a successful resurrection. She discovers that her comeback attempt was not a failure and realizes that she has been reborn, for a while at least, as a Hollywood star.¹⁰

In Sweet Bird of Youth Williams returns to the treatment of escapism found in The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire except for one important difference. In those plays he focused on characters who continued their escapist activities until they were destroyed. In this later work, Chance Wayne does deny reality and live in illusions until he is castrated. Alexandra Del Lago, however, is able eventually to live in the real world without the dubious benefits of escapism. Williams does not permit her the luxury of fleeing completely from circumstances which trouble her into another existence since, unlike his fantasy play Camino Real, St. Cloud is not surrounded by a Terra Incognita. Thus this play contains not only a weak character who is so unable to face the realities of his life that he gains Williams'

¹⁰ Popkin, "Plays of Williams," p. 61.

sympathy and compassion but also an inherently courageous character who is allowed to recover from her escapist behavior and achieve the success the playwright feels she deserves.

VII. THE NIGHT OF THE IGUANA

In The Night of the Iguana Tennessee Williams presents not only escapists but also a character who for the most part has abandoned escapism as a way of life. The play, which opened in New York on December 28, 1961, at the Royale Theatre,¹ is set in the real world of Puerto Barrio, Mexico, on the verandah of the Costa Verde Hotel in September, 1940. The usual pattern for a Williams' escapist drama whose action occurs in such a non-fantasy setting is for the characters to continue their experiences with escapism until they undergo some sort of destruction. This work, however, deviates from that pattern since no one in its cast is devastated in the manner of a Blanche DuBois or a Chance Wayne. In addition, the possibility which Williams presents in Sweet Bird of Youth for an escapist to turn completely from that kind of behavior is actually refined and expanded in The Night of the Iguana to include a declaration of a philosophy of acceptance and endurance as an alternative to escapism. In Williams' words, "the most magnificent thing in all nature, is valor--and endurance."² Except for a consideration of the behavior of Fred and Maxine Faulk, the play is concerned with the activities and attitudes of the Reverend T.

¹ Tennessee Williams, The Night of the Iguana, Signet Books (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1961), p. 7.

² Quoted in Harry Taylor, "The Dilemma of Tennessee Williams," Masses & Mainstream, 1, No. 2 (1948), 55.

Lawrence Shannon and Miss Hannah Jelkes, two people whose potential for escapism is never fully realized since their past bouts with escapism are not continued into the future. The experiences of Shannon and Hannah form the basis of Williams' more optimistic view of how man can live courageously in reality in spite of the knowledge that easy avenues of escape are open to him.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Faulk are the owners of the Costa Verde Hotel in Puerto Barrio. She is a sensualist in her middle forties with a large appetite for sexual activity and rum-cocos. He is a diabetic fisherman, ten years older than his wife, who dies before the play opens as a result of an infected fishhook wound. Williams indicates in his notes accompanying the drama that the Costa Verde was a rather modest establishment located in an area that was not yet a mecca for tourists. As he says, "At that time--twenty years ago--the west coast of Mexico had not yet become the Las Vegas and Miami Beach of Mexico. The villages were still predominantly primitive Indian villages."³ The play begins during the off season when only one family is staying at the hotel. It is probably a combination of her desire to escape the loneliness and boredom which she feels because of the remote location of the hotel as well as the fact that her elderly husband was no longer able to satisfy her sexually which causes Maxine to take two young Mexican boys as her lovers. The reaction of her husband to this situation puzzles Maxine. She tells Shannon, "I mean I hired those diving-boys from the Quebrada

³ Tennessee Williams, The Night of the Iguana (New York: New Directions, 1962), p. 5. All further quotations from this edition will be indicated parenthetically.

six months before Fred died, and did he care? Did he give a damn when I started night-swimming with them? No. He'd go night-fishing, all night, and when I got up the next day, he'd be preparing to go out fishing again, but he just caught the fish and threw them back in the sea" (p. 22). Evidently Fred sought to escape an unpleasant confrontation with his wife over the two Mexicans by simply pretending to ignore their relationship with her. The fact that he was, however, troubled by her behavior is indicated by the way in which he went fishing not for the fish he caught but rather for the excuse it gave him not to observe her infidelity.

When Shannon arrives at the Costa Verde, Maxine turns her attention toward him and away from her lovers Pedro and Pancho. After telling him that Fred is dead, she makes it clear that she would like him to take over the place of her late husband in all aspects of her life. She replaces his socks and shoes with a pair belonging to Fred and invites Shannon to sleep in Fred's bedroom which is next to hers. Her bawdy talk, provocative dress, and suggestive actions leave no doubt as to her plans for him. Again, his attentions will, she hopes, satisfy both her sexual needs and her desires to avoid loneliness. Maxine acknowledges her position when she tells Shannon, "I know the difference between loving someone and just sleeping with someone. . . . We've both reached a point where we've got to settle for something that works for us in our lives--even if it isn't on the highest kind of level" (p. 81). Thus when Hannah arrives at the hotel and establishes an immediate rapport with Shannon, Maxine feels that her own relation-

ship with him is being challenged. After reluctantly agreeing to let Hannah and her grandfather stay at the Costa Verde for one night only, Maxine's jealousy prompts her to arrange for them to stay after that in the village at the Casa de Huéspedes. Instead of admitting the real reason behind those arrangements, Maxine merely tells Hannah, "The Costa Verde isn't the right place for you. Y'see, we cater to folks that like to rough it a little, and--well, frankly, we cater to younger people" (p. 42). Actually, she wants to get Hannah out of the way in order to escape competition with her over Shannon. She finally tells Hannah, however, "I got the vibrations between you--I'm very good at catching vibrations between people--and there sure was a vibration between you and Shannon the moment you got here. That, just that, believe me, nothing but that has made this . . . misunderstanding between us. So if you just don't mess with Shannon, you and your Grampa can stay on here as long as you want to, honey" (p. 74).

The Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon responds to several situations during his life by acting in the manner of an escapist. Ten years before the action of the play begins, he lived in Pleasant Valley, Virginia, where he was the minister of a church. As a result of offenses which he describes later as "Fornication and heresy . . . in the same week" (p. 54), however, he is locked out of his church and put into an asylum to recover from a complete nervous breakdown. Williams indicates how Shannon still feels about this part of his past when he describes him in the following way during Shannon's disclosure of these events to Hannah: "He is pacing the verandah with gathering agitation, and the

all-inclusive mockery that his guilt produces" (p. 54). Shannon's guilty feelings probably contributed to his first breakdown just as they continue to be part of the reasons behind the mental collapses which recur periodically throughout his life. As Maxine tells Hannah, "He cracks up like this so regular that you can set a calendar by it. Every eighteen months he does it, and twice he's done it here and I've had to pay for his medical care. . . . if he's not better tomorrow he's going into the Casa de Locos again like he did the last time he cracked up on me!" (p. 93). After leaving Virginia, Shannon travels all over the world as a tour guide. He escapes the loneliness inherent in such a rootless existence by means of sexual activity.

SHANNON: I've always traveled with trainloads, planeloads and busloads of tourists.

HANNAH: That doesn't mean you're still not really alone.

SHANNON: I never fail to make an intimate connection with someone in my parties. (p. 110)

He also depends upon liquor to help him avoid an awareness of some of the miserable circumstances which surround his trips. He travels through Mexico by bus over bad roads in hot weather, for example, "with a thermos-jug under the driver's seat which the Baptist College ladies think is filled with icewater but which I know is filled with iced tequila" (p. 14). Whenever he feels overwhelmed by the stresses and pressures of his journeys as well as his feelings of guilt, Shannon retreats to the Costa Verde Hotel for refuge. He talks each time with Fred Faulk, a man who can always tell when he is "spooked." Fred's death upsets Shannon because it was evidently through his conversations with him that he was able to escape the effects of the spook and regain enough composure to go back

out on tours. Jackson feels that the spook is Shannon's name for the sense of guilt which haunts him.⁴ As Hannah accurately observes, ". . . Mr. Shannon, don't kid yourself that you ever travel with someone. You have always traveled alone except for your spook, as you call it. He's your traveling companion. Nothing, nobody else has traveled with you" (p. 111). Shannon himself describes the spook and its relationship to the Costa Verde by saying, "But when you live on the fantastic level as I have lately but have got to operate on the realistic level, that's when you're spooked, that's the spook. . . . I thought I'd shake the spook here but conditions have changed here. I didn't know the patrona had turned to a widow, a sort of bright widow spider" (p. 69).

When Shannon arrives at the Costa Verde at the beginning of The Night of the Iguana, he is in a very desperate situation. Williams describes him by saying, "He is panting, sweating and wild-eyed. . . . His nervous state is terribly apparent; he is a young man who has cracked up before and is going to crack up again--perhaps repeatedly" (p. 8). The breakdown which Shannon seems currently to be the victim of has been caused by the group of eleven schoolteachers from Baptist Female College in Texas which he is guiding through Mexico. He describes them as "Absolutely the worst party I've ever been out with in ten years of conducting tours" (p.10). He also says, however, "I can't lose this party. _____ Blake Tours has put me on probation because I had a bad party last month that tried to get me sacked and I am now on probation with Blake Tours."

⁴ Jackson, Broken World of Williams, p. 152.

If I lose this party I'll be sacked for sure . . ." (p. 10). Shannon knows that even though the job he has is not a very good one, it is his last chance for employment. As he tells Maxine, "You know my situation: I lose this job, what's next? There's nothing lower than Blake Tours, Maxine honey" (p. 11). Therefore, in spite of the difficulties he will encounter with the teachers if he continues the tour, he makes every effort to escape losing them as customers. All he asks is a few days of rest at the Costa Verde in order to regain the strength he must have if he is to go on. Most of the complaints the teachers have made about the tour concern their food and their accommodations. Thus when they object to staying at the Costa Verde instead of at the Ambos Mundos in the heart of Puerto Barrio, Shannon tries to impress them with statements about Maxine's hotel which are actually not always true. He hopes to deceive the teachers enough so that they will be satisfied with the Costa Verde and neither report him to his superiors nor try to get him fired. Shannon tries to solicit the help of the bus driver in his cause by telling him, "She's got a Chinaman cook here, you won't believe the menu. The cook's from Shanghai, handled the kitchen at an exclusive club there. I got him here for her, and he's a bug, a fanatic about--whew!--continental cuisine . . . can even make beef Stroganoff and thermidor dishes" (p. 12). However, when the driver is handed a sample menu, "MAXINE chuckles, as if perpetrating a practical joke" (p. 12). Her behavior seems to indicate that the meals are not really as outstanding as Shannon claims them to be. At one point Shannon tells Miss Fellowes, the leader of the group of teachers, "The view from

this verandah is equal and I think better than the view from Victoria Peak in Hong Kong, the view from the roof-terrace of the Sultan's palace in--" (p. 17). This allocation is made so grandly that it sounds like an exaggeration and is hard to be believed. Shannon also tries to charm Miss Fellowes into agreeing to stay at the Costa Verde by saying, "Now I really must ask you to let this party of ladies come up here and judge the accommodations for themselves and compare them with what they saw passing through town. Miss Fellowes, there is such a thing as charm and beauty in some places" (p. 25). She replies, however, "I've taken a look at those rooms and they'd make a room at the 'Y' look like a suite at the Ritz" (p. 25).

Maxine Faulk's interest in Shannon is more than just the casual concern of a woman for a friend of her late husband. She wishes him to become not only her partner in the hotel business but also her lover. However, as long as he still holds his job with Blake Tours, Shannon tries to resist her overtures and escape the kind of future with her which she longs for.

MAXINE: . . . You I'll put in Fred's old room, next to me.

SHANNON: You want me in his socks and his shoes and in his room next to you? [He stares at her with a shocked surmise of her intentions toward him, then flops back down in the hammock with an incredulous laugh.]
Oh no, honey. (pp. 22-23)

During their lives Maxine and Shannon each experience sexual activity in order to escape loneliness. For example, he explains the affairs he has had with female members of his various tours by saying simply, "People need human contact, Maxine honey" (p. 20). In spite of such

feelings, Shannon deliberately ignores her request to accompany him when he goes down to the beach at sunset for a swim. He knows that the beach has been the site of her nightly rendezvous with her two Mexican lovers. However, he also knows that he does not want to devote time to her which he could be using in his attempts to avoid losing his job. Shannon refuses to be swayed by Maxine's direct invitations to remain with her at the Costa Verde.

MAXINE: Stay here.

SHANNON: In Fred's old bedroom--yeah, in Fred's old bedroom.

MAXINE: You could do worse.

SHANNON: Could I? Well, then, I'll do worse, I'll . . . do worse.

MAXINE: Aw now, baby.

SHANNON: If I could do worse, I'll do worse. (p. 29)

Rather than be her pawn, he prefers to live his life on his own terms and continue guiding tours.

When Shannon arrives at the Costa Verde, he resists Maxine's offer of a rum-coco by saying, "No, no. I want a cold beer. If I start drinking rum-cocos now I won't stop drinking rum-cocos" (p. 9). Later, even Hannah notes, "Mrs. Faulk, he's putting up a struggle not to drink" (p. 71). At one point, "He removes her [Maxine's] drink from her hand and it seems as if he might drink it, but he only sniffs it, with an expression of repugnance" (p. 60). Nevertheless, Maxine continues to urge him to have rum-cocos.

MAXINE [returning to SHANNON] : I thought you were gonna break down and take a drink, Reverend.

SHANNON: Just the odor of liquor makes me feel nauseated.

MAXINE: You couldn't smell it if you got it in you. (p. 61)

Maxine feels that if she is able to convince him to relax and have a

drink then she will also be able to convince him to forget about Blake Tours and stay with her. Shannon, however, is just as determined to remain sober and defend himself against those who are trying to get him fired.

LATTA: How's our boy doin', Maxine?

MAXINE: He'd feel better if I could get him to take a drink.

LATTA: Can't you get a drink down him?

MAXINE: Nope, not even a rum-coco.

LATTA: Let's have a rum-coco, Larry.

SHANNON: You have a rum-coco, Jake. I have a party of ladies to take care of. (pp. 83-84)

Jake Latta is the man who ultimately takes over Shannon's tour with the schoolteachers from Baptist Female College. He receives his instructions in a telegram from the home office of Blake Tours as a result of the complaints made about Shannon's behavior by Miss Fellowes. In order to pacify her Latta says, "Miss Fellowes, I want you to know that Blake Tours was deceived about this character's background and Blake Tours will see that he is blacklisted from now on at every travel agency in the States" (p. 90). Latta brings Shannon no severance pay and strands him at the Costa Verde when he departs with the teachers to finish the tour. Only then, after he has lost his job as a guide, does Shannon change his attitude toward Maxine and all her requests.

Shannon's first reaction to the loss of his job is to attempt to escape life completely by committing suicide. He tells Hannah, "I'm going swimming. I'm going to swim out to China!" (p. 93). Fortunately, Maxine sends Pedro and Pancho after him and they tie him up in a hammock on the verandah before he can carry out his threat. After he calms down, Shannon mixes the first of several rum-cocos for himself to drink. He

also expresses his willingness to become intimate with Maxine.

SHANNON: . . . tonight, when the moon's gone down, if
you'll let me out of this hammock, I'll try
to imagine you as a . . . as a nymph in her teens.

MAXINE: A fat lot of good you'd be in your present condition.

SHANNON: Don't be a sexual snob at your age, honey. (p. 102)

Since he realizes that he has nowhere else to go and no prospects for another job, he decides to remain with Maxine after all. As he says, "So I stay here, I reckon, and live off la patrona for the rest of my life. Well, she's old enough to predecease me. She could check out of here first, and I imagine that after a couple of years of having to satisfy her I might be prepared for the shock of her passing on" (p. 121). The play ends at night with Shannon taking a rum-coco from Maxine and going down with her to the beach for a swim. He makes these decisions as a result of both the new situation created by his being fired from Blake Tours and the advice given him by Hannah Jelkes. He learns to accept life with Maxine since there is really no other possible path open for him to travel. Williams describes Shannon as he exits with Maxine by saying, "He chuckles happily" (p. 126). Thus he seems to imply that Shannon's major problems, such as his frequent mental breakdowns, are now behind him. Shannon's future with Maxine may not be the best, but he will be able to endure it and survive.

Basic to Williams' view of life is what he calls "the need for understanding and tenderness and fortitude among individuals trapped by circumstances."⁵ Hannah Jelkes exhibits all three of these qualities

⁵ Quoted in Barnett, "Tennessee Williams," p. 116.

as the relationship between herself and Shannon develops during the play. She is another traveler who arrives at the Costa Verde Hotel in desperate circumstances. In contrast to Shannon, however, she does not rely solely on escapism to help her out of her predicament. She reacts instead with the same courage and strength which have characterized most of her actions during her life. For example, except for one deceptive statement about the condition of her companion, her aging grandfather whom she calls Nonno, she tells the truth about the unfortunate situation she is in. Her grandfather is Jonathan Coffin, a ninety-seven-year-old poet. At first, when Maxine seems reluctant to admit Hannah and Nonno to the Costa Verde because he is in a wheelchair, Hannah lies and tells her, "Oh, no, no, he just sprained his ankle a little in Taxco this morning. He just needs a good night's rest, he'll be on his feet tomorrow" (p. 32). After that, however, she makes no attempt to hide the truth about herself and Nonno from either Shannon or Maxine. To him she admits, "I'm dreadfully afraid my grandfather had a slight stroke in those high passes through the sierras" (p. 38). To her she confesses, "We tried every hotel in town and they wouldn't take us. I'm afraid I have to place myself at your . . . mercy" (p. 37). The only other time in the play that Hannah deliberately lies occurs soon after she meets Shannon, when she tries to help him through a very difficult confrontation with Charlotte Goodall and Miss Fellowes. Charlotte, a member of the group Shannon has been guiding through Mexico, is a sixteen-year-old musical prodigy who feels that Shannon should marry her since he made love to her. Miss Fellowes, Charlotte's chaperone, wants not only to have Blake Tours

fire Shannon but also to have him charged with statutory rape. Shannon would like to escape both the trouble Miss Fellowes has planned for him and the marriage Charlotte has planned for him. Therefore, when he realizes they are on the verandah of the Costa Verde looking for him, he runs into his room and slams the door. Hannah observes his flight and tries to mislead each of the women.

MISS FELLOWES: Shannon, Shannon! Where are you?

HANNAH: I think Mr. Shannon has gone down to the beach.

MISS FELLOWES: Was Charlotte Goodall with him? A young blonde girl in our party--was she with him?

HANNAH: No, nobody was with him, he was completely alone.

MISS FELLOWES: I heard a door slam.

HANNAH: That was mine.

MISS FELLOWES [pointing to the door with the gauze sticking out] : Is this yours?

HANNAH: Yes, mine. I rushed out to catch the sunset.

(pp. 50-51)

Similarly, when Charlotte asks if she has seen Shannon, Hannah replies, "Oh, Mr. Shannon. I think he went down to the beach" (p. 46).

Since the death of her parents, Hannah has spent her life traveling around the world with her grandfather. His poetic recitations and her paintings and sketches have brought them enough money to live on. Her fortitude is revealed when Shannon asks her what she will do when her grandfather dies and she replies, "Stop or go on . . . probably go on" (p. 110). Some of Hannah's other statements, including "I am not a weak person" (p. 72) and "when I have to be resourceful, I can be very resourceful" (p. 106), provide further assessments of her personality. She is a strong woman who has survived various threats to her existence including that of a nervous breakdown. Fedder describes her as probably the most admirable and certainly the strongest of all Williams' characters.⁶

⁶ Fedder, Influence of Lawrence on Williams, p. 113.

As Hannah tells Shannon,

I never cracked up, I couldn't afford to. Of course, I nearly did once. I was young once, Mr. Shannon, but I was one of those people who can be young without really having their youth, and not to have your youth when you are young is naturally very disturbing. But I was lucky. My work, this occupational therapy that I gave myself--painting and doing quick character sketches--made me look out of myself, not in, and gradually, at the far end of the tunnel that I was struggling out of I began to see this faint, very faint gray light--the light of the world outside me--and I kept climbing toward it. I had to. (p. 107)

Even though Hannah does win a major victory when she refuses to let herself be conquered by this breakdown and thus escape from her troubled youth by retreating to an asylum, there are other times in her life when crisis situations cause her to feel panicky. She responds to these times of stress in the play in two specific ways: taking deep breaths and drinking poppyseed tea.

Hannah: He [Nonno] thinks you're me, Mr. Shannon. Help him into a chair. Please stay with him a minute, I. . . .

[She moves away from the table and breathes as if she has just been dragged up half-drowned from the sea. . . .]

SHANNON [crossing to HANNAH] : What're you breathing like that for?

HANNAH: Some people take a drink, some take a pill. I just take a few deep breaths. (pp. 65-66)

Taking these breaths seems to calm her down by giving her feelings of tension time to subside. Hannah describes the calming effect of the tea when she tells Shannon, "It's a mild, sedative drink that helps you get through nights that are hard for you to get through" (p. 98). These minor bits of escapism are significant since they reveal how she must struggle every day to keep her balance in the real world. Without such moments of evasion she might easily be overwhelmed by the circumstances

of her life.

Another way in which Hannah manages to survive each day is by following the various pieces of advice which she gives Shannon. She knows that they are kindred spirits and that he may be able to learn from her experiences how to cope with his own life. As she tells Maxine, "A long time ago, Mrs. Faulk, I had experience with someone in Mr. Shannon's condition, so I know how necessary it is to let them be quiet for a while" (p. 101). Of course Hannah herself is the person she once knew who, like Shannon, was on the verge of a breakdown. After describing the second of her two love experiences, an encounter in a Singapore sampan with a middle-aged Australian salesman, Hannah tells Shannon that the moral of the story is, "Accept whatever situation you cannot improve" (p. 115). Indeed, her attitude toward the unusual sexual behavior of the salesman is marked by understanding and compassion and not by fear or disgust. As Arthur Ganz observes, Hannah's reaction to the abnormal sexual drives of another person is quite different from that of Blanche DuBois, an earlier Williams' character. Blanche was an escapist who could not accept the reality of the homosexuality of her husband. Rather than drive the salesman to suicide, however, as Blanche did Allan Grey, Hannah acts without escapism and offers her companion in the sampan all the help and sympathy she can.⁷ Another example of how Hannah abides by this philosophy of acceptance can be found earlier in the play in one of her conversations with Maxine.

⁷ Arthur Ganz, "The Desperate Morality of the Plays of Tennessee Williams," American Scholar, 31 (1962), 286.

MAXINE: You're completely broke, are you?
 HANNAH: Yes, we are--completely.
 MAXINE: You say that like you're proud of it.
 HANNAH: I'm not proud of it or ashamed of it either.
 It just happens to be what's happened to us,
 which has never happened before in all our
 travels. (pp. 43-44)

Rather than being horribly upset and agonizing out loud about her situation, Hannah simply acknowledges the fact that she and her grandfather have no money.

In a cover story on Williams in Time magazine, The Night of the Iguana is called the greatest of his plays of self-transcendence. In such works a person feels so deeply for another person that he puts concern for himself totally to one side in order to be able to help that person better.⁸ Virtually all of Hannah's behavior with Shannon, as well as her life of devotion for her grandfather, can be seen as the result of her having reached moments of self-transcendence in her relationships with those two men. The positive influence which Hannah has upon Shannon is evident the very first time he sees her. When she walks up the jungle path and stands by the verandah of the Costa Verde Hotel, Shannon is "suddenly pacified by her appearance" (p. 18). When she returns to the verandah a few minutes later with her grandfather, "SHANNON looks at HANNAH and NONNO steadily, with a relief of tension almost like that of someone going under hypnosis" (p. 30). Williams makes this point a third time when he describes Shannon as "becoming progressively quieter under the cool influence of her voice behind

⁸ "Angel of the Odd," p. 53.

him" (p. 97).

According to Ferdinand Leon, Hannah and Shannon like each other because they have a common hatred of unkindness.⁹ They are both aware of the strong desire she has to assist him through his most recent mental crisis.

SHANNON: . . . How'd you learn how to light a match in the wind?
 HANNAH: Oh, I've learned lots of useful little things like that. I wish I'd learned some big ones.
 SHANNON: Such as what?
 HANNAH: How to help you, Mr. Shannon. . . .
 SHANNON: Now I know why I came here!
 HANNAH: To meet someone who can light a match in the wind?
 SHANNON [looking down at the table, his voice choking] :
 To meet someone who wants to help me, Miss Jelkes. (p. 76)

Hannah feels that Shannon's periodic breakdowns are caused in part by his inability to find something to believe in. Her own experience in such matters tells her that nothing is more valuable than honest and sincere communication between two people. Instead of cracking up in order to escape moments of stress, he should seek out other compassionate people and gain the strength he needs from communion with them.

HANNAH: Liquor isn't your problem, Mr. Shannon.
 SHANNON: What is my problem, Miss Jelkes?
 HANNAH: The oldest one in the world--the need to believe in something or in someone--almost anyone--almost anything . . . something.
 SHANNON: Your voice sounds hopeless about it.
 HANNAH: No, I'm not hopeless about it. In fact, I've discovered something to believe in.
 SHANNON: Something like . . . God?
 HANNAH: No.
 SHANNON: What?

⁹ Ferdinand Leon, "Time, Fantasy, and Reality in Night of the Iguana," Modern Drama, 2 (1968), 92.

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

SHANNON: One night stands, huh?

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

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

HANNAH: No.

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

HANNAH: A little understanding exchanged between them, a wanting to help each other through nights like this.
(pp. 103-104)

Hannah's discussion of how she conquered her "blue devil," the name she gave to the force which almost caused her to have a mental collapse in her youth, is intended to show Shannon how he can beat his spook. She wants him to believe that even though he may still be troubled and have to rely on rum-cocos for moments of relief, it is possible for him to win a significant victory over his spook and have no further breakdowns.

HANNAH: Yes. I can help you because I've been through what you are going through now. I had something like your spook--I just had a different name for him. I called him the blue devil, and . . . oh . . . we had quite a battle, quite a contest between us.

SHANNON: Which you obviously won.

HANNAH: I couldn't afford to lose.

SHANNON: How'd you beat your blue devil?

HANNAH: I showed him that I could endure him and I made him respect my endurance.

SHANNON: How?

HANNAH: Just by, just by . . . enduring. Endurance is something that spooks and blue devils respect. And they respect all the tricks that panicky people use to outlast and outwit their panic.

SHANNON: Like poppyseed tea?

HANNAH: Poppyseed tea or rum-cocos or just a few deep breaths. Anything, everything, that we take to give them the slip, and so to keep on going. (pp. 104-105)

Hannah's message seems to be that, in spite of the difficulties of life,

one should accept his existence and endure whatever may come his way. Williams himself has said, "Actually The Night of the Iguana is a play whose theme, as closely as I can put it, is how to live beyond despair and still live."¹⁰ Furthermore, according to the playwright, the characters in the drama "are learning to reach the point of utter despair and still go past it with courage."¹¹ By the end of the play Shannon has decided to stay with Maxine at the Costa Verde Hotel since that is about the only alternative left to him. He is helped to make this decision by Hannah who advises, "We all wind up with something or with someone, and if it's someone instead of just something, we're lucky, perhaps . . . unusually lucky" (p. 117). Thus it is her influence which saves Shannon from destruction and teaches him to accept his fate with Maxine.

The primary symbol in The Night of the Iguana is, of course, the iguana that is captured by Pedro and Pancho and tied up beneath the verandah of the Costa Verde Hotel. The Mexican boys plan to fatten the creature up, kill it, and eat it. With regard to the theme of escapism in the play, the predicament of the iguana represents the current crisis in Shannon's life. Shannon describes himself to Miss Fellowes as "a man at the end of his rope" (p. 24). The iguana struggles to escape its confinement just as Shannon struggles to avoid losing his job and becoming further involved with Charlotte Goodall. According to Shannon, iguanas tied up by their tails have been known to flee from their captors

¹⁰ Quoted in Booth and Funke, "Williams on Williams," p. 72.

¹¹ Quoted in Donahue, Dramatic World of Williams, p. 150.

by chewing their tails off. Such an escape accomplished by means of self-injury could refer to the way in which he eluded overwhelming tensions in his life by having harmful mental breakdowns. The iguana under the verandah, however, faces a different situation since it is tied up by the neck and not the tail. If it is to get away, it must have the help of another party. The different thing about Shannon's latest sojourn at the Costa Verde is that Hannah is also there. Her background and compassionate nature make it possible for her to help him just as he is in the position to aid the iguana. At her urging, he cuts the iguana loose and puts an end to its escape attempts. Similarly, by means of her advice and influence, Hannah frees Shannon from the grip of his frequent mental collapses. For Maxine, a pair of shoes and socks belonging to her late husband represent her chance to escape a lonely life at the Costa Verde Hotel. When Shannon arrives at the beginning of the play, she tries to get him to put on Fred's shoes and agree to stay with her. She wants to have Shannon's company and thus avoid the boredom she knows she would feel without him around. He answers her request, however, literally and figuratively, by saying, "I loved ole Fred but I don't want to fill his shoes, honey" (p. 20).

The significance of The Night of the Iguana in the body of Williams' dramatic works has been recognized by both literary critics and the playwright himself. Jackson considers it an important play for its author because it deals with the growth of tenderness between people and shows possible solutions for some of the problems facing mankind.¹²

¹² Jackson, Broken World of Williams, pp. 150-51.

Williams' comments in the following interview published in Theatre Arts are also interesting:

INTERVIEWER: Some time ago you said you were hoping someday to write one play that would encompass everything that you've been trying to say. Is Iguana the play?

WILLIAMS: I was trying to work on it in Iguana, yes, at least a kind of summation of what I've derived finally from these mixed feelings and attitudes.

INTERVIEWER: You might say, then, that from your point of view Iguana is the most important of your plays.

WILLIAMS: For my own personal selfish satisfaction at least.¹³

In The Night of the Iguana Williams clearly presents a picture of the way in which he would like men and women to respond to unpleasant situations in their lives. Rather than reacting weakly and fearfully and employing convenient escape mechanisms, a strong Williams' character will ultimately accept his existence and endure in spite of the difficulties involved. Williams not only depicts such a character in this play in the person of Hannah Jelkes, he also shows the creation of another as a result of her compassionate interest in a fellow human being. Hannah teaches Shannon what she has learned: endurance is better than escapism. The play is basically such an optimistic work that even a consistent escapist like Maxine Faulk does not reap the destruction which usually comes to those in other realistic Williams' dramas who try to avoid what the world has in store for them.

¹³ Booth and Funke, "Williams on Williams," p. 18.

VIII. CONCLUSION

To say that The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, Camino Real, Sweet Bird of Youth, and The Night of the Iguana are the best representatives of all of Tennessee Williams' full-length dramas of his three approaches to the theme of escapism correctly implies that the rest of Williams' long plays can each be considered in one of these three categories. For example, John Buchanan, Jr. in Summer and Smoke ultimately abandons his wild living and accepts the challenge of becoming a doctor. In The Rose Tattoo Serafina delle Rose finally recovers from the shock of her beloved husband's death and acknowledges the reality of his adultery with Estelle Hohengarten. By the end of the Broadway version of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Brick Pollitt relents somewhat toward his wife Maggie and agrees to resume sleeping with her. In Period of Adjustment both Ralph and Dorothea Bates and George and Isabel Haverstick resolve their personal differences and decide not to leave each other and end their marriages after all. As a result of the advice given her by Christopher Flanders, Mrs. Goforth in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore finally accepts the fact that she is dying and allows Chris to escort her to her deathbed. Since John, Serafina, Brick, Ralph and Dorothea, George and Isabel, and Mrs. Goforth are characters in realistic dramas who turn from their escapist activities and decide to endure whatever life brings to them in the real world, then the plays in which they

appear resemble Sweet Bird of Youth and The Night of the Iguana and present Williams' third attitude toward the theme of escapism. The Eccentricities of a Nightingale, a later version of Summer and Smoke, lacks the dramatic descriptions of John's experiences with escapism which are found in the earlier work. The play deals largely, instead, with the behavior of Alma Winemiller and her mother, two escapists who continue their evasion of reality until they lose their opportunities for a normal, happy life. Thus, like The Glass Menagerie and A Street-car Named Desire, The Eccentricities of a Nightingale only portrays escapists whose activities are really futile, since through them they harm themselves in some way. These dramas convey Williams' first point of view about escapism. Other realistic plays belonging to this group include Suddenly Last Summer, Battle of Angels, and Orpheus Descending. In Suddenly Last Summer Mrs. Venable persists in trying to hide the truth about her son until the real nature of his life and death becomes known publically and her beautiful image of him is destroyed. No characters forsake escapism entirely in either of Williams' plays about Val Xavier and the fugitive kind. Vee Talbott in Battle of Angels eludes the unpleasant realities of her life as the wife of a sheriff in a small town until at last she goes insane. Carol Cutrere in Orpheus Descending debauches herself with liquor and sex as she tries to escape loneliness. The second treatment of the theme of escapism in Williams' long plays is exemplified by Camino Real. A few escapists in this fantasy are able to flee successfully from the scene of their troubled existence into another world without suffering any injury. According to Nelson,

Williams' Stairs to the Roof is another drama which allows its hero, Benjamin Murphy, this kind of an escape. Murphy is permitted to transcend the universe and is transported via a timely deus ex machina to a distant star only because he is depicted in a fantasy world in which nothing is impossible.¹

A study of escapism in the plays of Tennessee Williams presupposes that there are certain things which Williams' characters are trying desperately to escape from. Throughout this thesis the motives behind the actions of each escapist, as well as the various activities each one has engaged in, have all been carefully considered. A summary of the reasons which prompt Williams' dramatic characters to try to avoid reality is provided by Weales. He notes that Williams' creations resort to escapism whenever they feel menaced by other people, by themselves, or by the universe. The other person that Tom Wingfield tries to get away from is his mother. She demands behavior from him which conflicts with his own ideas of how he wants to spend his life. The primary forces within themselves which torture Williams' characters into becoming escapists are guilt and fear. Both Blanche DuBois and Brick Pollitt feel guilty for having contributed to the death of another person. Guilt haunts Tom Wingfield after he deserts his sister Laura. Laura herself retreats from the world because she is terrified of being hurt by social failure. Fear of sexual failure causes George Haverstick to avoid intimacy with his young bride. Weales feels that the universe, or human mortality, or time, is the most threatening of the influences which cause people in Williams' plays to become escapists. Alexandra

¹ Nelson, Tennessee Williams, pp. 74, 179, 248.

Del Lago begins her flight across the country because she is afraid that the close-ups in her new film will reveal that she is growing old. The passing of time, however, involves not only the loss of beauty and youth but also the fact of death. Big Daddy Pollitt and Mrs. Go-forth try to deny reality by pretending that they are not going to die.²

The following quotation is taken from Williams' short story "Desire and the Black Masseuse":

A wall that has been omitted from a house because the stones were exhausted, a room in a house left unfurnished because the householder's funds were not sufficient--these sorts of incompleteness are usually covered up or glossed over by some kind of make-shift arrangement. The nature of man is full of such make-shift arrangements, devised by himself to cover his incompleteness. 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 purpose of art, is a mask he devises to cover his incompleteness.³

These statements are significant since they provide in Williams' own words further insights about the motivations and behavior of escapist in his literary works. Nelson observes that the passage is an enlightening commentary on both the playwright's life and literature. The philosophy reflected in the quotation is that man is incomplete because he is part of an incomplete, fragmented universe. In order to hide his incompleteness or escape from something lacking in his own nature, man uses various masks and forms of compensation. Thus Williams himself, according to Nelson, became a writer in an effort to compensate for or

² Weales, Tennessee Williams, pp. 24-29.

³ Tennessee Williams, One Arm and Other Stories (New York: New Directions, 1948), p. 85.

escape from the ill effects of what he feels is his personal incom-
 pletion. With regard to characters in Williams' plays, Laura and Amanda
 and Tom Wingfield, Jim O'Connor, and Blanche DuBois rely on dreams and
 imagination to mask their incompletions.⁴ Other escapists including
 Serafina delle Rose, Jacques Casanova, Prudence Duvernoy, Big Daddy,
 Big Mama, Gooper and Mae Pollitt, Mrs. Venable, Chance Wayne, Boss
 Finley, George and Isabel Haverstick, and Mrs. Goforth use illusions to
 compensate for the gap which exists between the way the world really is
 and the way they would like both it and themselves to be.

Escapism is by no means all that Tennessee Williams writes about.
 However, escapists do appear in every one of his long plays. No matter
 how the subject is approached, a study of the theme of escapism in
 Williams' full-length dramas is valuable for several reasons. From a
 biographical point of view, a study of escapists and their behavior
 patterns contributes to a better understanding of some of the events
 of Williams' own life. From a dramatic point of view, an analysis of
 escapism facilitates a fuller appreciation of the way in which action
 is motivated, conflict is produced, mood and setting are determined,
 and character traits are established in Williams' various plays. From
 a philosophical point of view, an examination of the few escapists who
 recover their dignity and face reality bravely reveals Williams' positive
 statement of his admiration for what man is capable of in this world.
 Williams freely admits how he has resorted to escapist activities when-
 ever he has wanted to avoid unpleasant circumstances in his life. A

⁴ Nelson, Tennessee Williams, pp. 111-12, 190-91.

desire to elude reality was actually the main reason behind his decision to become a writer. In addition to the other information supplied by an examination of escapism in Williams' long plays, such a study provides a vantage point for a consideration of his considerable abilities as a creator of memorable characters and symbols. As Philip Weissman notes, Williams portrays his characters so completely that audiences and critics alike usually have definite emotional responses to those creations even though all their responses are not always favorable.⁵ Williams is concerned with the various reactions people make to the situations they encounter during their lives. Thus some of his dramatic characters face existence squarely without resorting to escapist behavior. Others are depicted as weaker individuals who are often destroyed since they are unable to accept the hostile realities the world inflicts upon them. Even though Williams sympathizes with these escapists, he appears to have more genuine admiration for those characters who have the ability to abandon escapism as a way of life after having engaged in it for some time. In contrast to those who live and never need to rely on the dubious benefits of escapism, former escapists endure their existence by resisting the temptation to run away from disappointments or smother unpleasant truths in illusions. The many-faceted view of escapism which Williams is able to present in his plays is only one result of the great talent he possesses as a literary artist.

⁵ Philip Weissman, Creativity in the Theater: A Psychoanalytic Study (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1965), p. 174.

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